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Front Cover: *Scissor-cut by an unknown folk artist*

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MAO TSE-TUNG

Six Poems

The six poems printed here were first published in 1962 in the May issue of *People's Literature*. As the author pointed out in his preface to the poems, they were written between 1929 and 1931. This was a period when the whole of China was under the white terror and the people were going through tremendous hardships. Chiang Kai-shek had by then established his reactionary rule and was waging civil war, encircling and savagely attacking the people's forces. But the heroic Chinese workers and peasants, on the other hand, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, managed to set up revolutionary bases in the Chingkang Mountains in Kiangsi Province and many other places in western Fukien. In these bases while intensifying the agrarian struggle, they strengthened the revolutionary armed forces, so that they were in a position to inflict crushing defeats upon Chiang's first and second encirclement campaigns. This opened up splendid prospects for the Chinese revolution.

The translation given here is based on the translators' understanding of the text and can hardly claim to have brought out in full the meaning and spirit of the original. Thanks are due to Professor Chien Chung-shu of the Institute of Literary Research of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, who has carefully read the translation and made valuable suggestions.

These six poems were hummed into rhyme on horseback between 1929 and 1931; after that I completely forgot them. The editors of *People's Literature* have collected and sent them to me with a request for publication. I am sending them back with a few minor changes.

— Mao Tse-tung
April 27, 1962

I*

— to the melody of *Ching Ping Lo* (清平樂)

Swift bursts the storm,
The warlords fight again,
Spattering distress and anger among men —
Another dream that will end ere the millet is done.**

* Written at the end of September or in the beginning of October 1929, shortly after the Chinese Red Army captured Changting on the River Ting and Lungyen and Shanghang in south-western Fukien.

** According to the *Tale of the Pillow* written by Shen Chi-chi of the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618-907), a destitute young man met a Taoist priest who gave him a pillow, saying: "You shall have your every wish if you sleep on this pillow." The young man did as he was told and dreamed that he had great wealth and high position. A pot of millet had just been put on to cook when he fell asleep, and he woke to find himself as poor as ever before the millet was done.

Red flags have leapt the River Ting,
Sweeping down to Lungyen and Shanghang;
Mended in part is the golden bowl,*
We are hard at work now sharing out the land.

II**

— to the melody of *Tsai Sang Tzu* (采桑子)

Mortals may age, not Nature:
Year after year the Double Ninth returns;
And this year on the festival of the Double Ninth
How sweet the yellow blooms in the battle-field!

Each year in season blows the autumn wind,
A far cry from the splendour of spring;
Yet braver than all spring's splendour
This far-flung river and sky, this world sprinkled
with frost!

* In classical Chinese a golden bowl stood for the entire territory of the country.

** Written on October 11, 1929. The Double Ninth which marks the height of autumn according to the lunar calendar fell on this day that year.

III*

— to the melody of *Chien Tzu Mu Lan Hua* (減字木蘭花)

The entire universe is white;
We advance through snow, the green pines lost to sight;
Crags loom above our heads,
Wind flutters the red flag as we march through the strong pass.

Where is this column bound?
To the River Kan hidden in whirling snow;
Yesterday the order was given:
The mighty army of workers and peasants drives on Chian!

* Written in February 1930, when the Chinese Red Army was driving on Chian, a town on the River Kan in Kiangsi.

IV*

— to the melody of *Tieh Lien Hua* (蝶戀花)

In June our heavenly troops wage war on festering evil,
Their ten-league cord will capture Kun and Peng;**
A corner over there beyond the Kan glows red
Where Huang Kung-liao*** has turned the enemy flank.

One million workers and peasants in arms show their mettle,
They have swept Kiangsi and are pounding Hunan and Hupeh;
The *Internationale* sounds — a song for heroes —
And a blustering wind**** comes down for us from the sky.

* Written in June 1930, shortly after the Chinese Red Army launched an attack on Nanchang, provincial capital of Kiangsi.

** A giant fish and bird in Chinese mythology. Here they stand for the reactionary Kuomintang leaders.

*** A well-known general of the Chinese Red Army, who was born in 1898 and died in 1931.

**** This refers to the revolutionary movement then rising and expanding throughout the country.

V*

— to the melody of *Yu Chia Ao* (漁家傲)

Forests blaze red beneath the frosty sky,
Our heavenly fighters' anger batters the firmament;
Mist veils Lungkang,** its thousand peaks are dim,
And the men shout with one voice:
Our troops ahead have captured Chang Hui-tsan!***

Two hundred thousand strong they returned to Kiangsi;
Half the horizon was lost in billowing smoke;
Workers and peasants have risen in their millions
To fight as one man,
And the foot of Puchou**** is a riot of red flags!

* Written some time between January and May 1931. During that period the Chinese Red Army launched two successful counter-attacks against the so-called "mopping-up campaign" organized by Chiang Kai-shek.

** A strategic town in the mountains of Kiangsi.

*** Commander-in-chief of the Kuomintang forces at the front.

**** See the author's note on p. 9.

VI*

— to the melody of *Yu Chia Ao* (漁家傲)

Clouds tower on the summit of White Cloud Mountain,**
At the foot of White Cloud Mountain cries of dismay;
Withered trees and rotten stumps strain
To seem a forest of rifles,
But our winged command sweeps down on them from the skies.

In fifteen days we marched seven hundred *li*;
Misty Kan's waters, green the hills of Fukien;
We rolled back the enemy like a mat—
Hear them wailing!
Down fall their bastions built at every step!

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang

* Written in May 1931, after the Chinese Red Army's successful counter-attack against Chiang Kai-shek's second "mopping-up campaign."

** In Kiangsi near the Fukien border.

The author's note:

On the story of how Kungkung butted Mount Puchou:

According to the chapter "On Astronomy" in *Huai Nan Tzu*, "When Kung-kung fought Chuanhsu of old for supremacy, in his rage he butted Mount

Puchou, breaking the pillars of heaven and snapping the moorings of the earth. Then the sky slid towards the northwest, the sun, moon, stars and constellations shifted, and a gap was made in the earth in the southeast where dust and water gathered."

According to the "Anecdotes of Chou" in the *Kuo Yu*, "In ancient times Kungkung abandoned the right way to give himself up to pleasure and to licence. He tried to dam the hundred streams and raze hills to fill up low places, to destroy the whole earth. But all-powerful Heaven withheld its blessing from him and the people did not assist him. Calamities and troubles broke out and Kungkung perished." The commentary by Wei Chao of the state of Wu of the Three Kingdoms period adds: "The palace officer Chia (Chia Kuei of the Later Han dynasty) said: Kungkung was a baron of the Chiang clan, a descendant of the Fiery Emperor. When Chuanhsu's power declined, Kungkung attacked the other barons and fought Kaohsin for the crown."

According to the "Dynastic History of the Three Emperors" added by Ssuma Chen to the *Historical Records*, "Towards the end of her (Nukua's) reign, one of the barons named Kungkung rose to power by means of craft and ruthlessness. He was a despot, no true king. Using water to overcome wood, he fought Chuyung. Defeated, he knocked his head in rage against Mount Puchou, so that the pillars of heaven were broken and the moorings of the earth torn."

The author comments: These versions differ. I choose that of *Huai Nan Tzu*, which presents Kungkung as a conquering hero. See what this says! "In his rage he butted Mount Puchou, breaking the pillars of heaven and snapping the moorings of the earth. Then the sky slid towards the northwest, the sun, moon, stars and constellations shifted, and a gap was made in the earth in the southeast where dust and water gathered." Did Kungkung die? Since there is no mention of this, we may take it that instead of dying he triumphed.

Red Maples by Lin Feng-mien ▶

See the article on the artist on p. 101.

The Old Stager

It was getting on for sunset. Mrs. Ho was thinking of cooping up her hens for the night when in came Brigade Leader Wu Yung-shou. With a quick look round the room, he asked:

"Where's the Old Stager, sister?"

"Don't ask me! Who sent him off to Bottle-gourd Reservoir last month?" she retorted half in fun and half in earnest.

"Now, sister, that's not fair! I didn't send him. He rolled up his bedding and nothing would stop him from going off with the lads of the Shock Brigade. What could I do? Why didn't you stop him yourself, if you're so smart?"

"If I were so smart, I'd be brigade leader, not you!" She went off abruptly on another tack: "Seriously, now, can't you ask the commune to stop work on the reservoir for a few days to get the sowing done? That rain this morning came just when it's wanted. Make hay while the sun shines, I say. The sky won't fall if you leave the reservoir till after the sowing."

"So you've got the commune at heart too!" Wu chuckled, then assured her: "A notice has gone out calling off work on the reservoir for the time being. Our village lads have just got back, that's why I thought the Old Stager. . . ."

"I don't care if he never comes back."

"Oho! Trying to take me in, when I know you're as pleased as can be!" He continued more seriously: "When your old man does get back, ask him to come straight to brigade headquarters, will you?"

He walked out, followed by Mrs. Ho, who said: "So you've got a job for him before he's home. What is it now?"

"To sow that fifty *mou* of high-yield crops. I want him to come and pick out a drill that suits him."

Mrs. Ho, hearing this, had no more to say. Ho could turn his hand to any kind of farm work and, when it came to sowing, there was no one to beat him for ten *li* around. He made drills straight as a die, with seeds evenly spaced at exactly the same depth: never a broken furrow or missing shoot. He was the obvious choice to sow that high-yield plot.

When Wu had gone and Mrs. Ho had cooped up the hens, she hurried indoors to light the stove and heat water. From the cupboard she took some noodles and five eggs, then filled a small jug with rice wine. Her old man always fancied his tot of wine, which helped him to sleep soundly. She would give him a drink so that he could have a good night before the sowing next morning. When all was ready, she sat down by the hearth, adding faggots from time to time as she waited for Ho.

Thirty years and more the old couple had been married, but they had no children. They got on well enough, apart from bickering. The trouble was that Mrs. Ho considered her husband a stubborn old fellow who cared more for the commune than his own home and took his work too seriously, while he thought her too narrow-minded and fond of nagging. So hardly a day passed without some tiff or squabble, and from time to time they went at it hammer and tongs. In fact, though, they were deeply attached to each other. Mrs. Ho was devoted to her husband. He had been at the reservoir for over a month, and not a day passed but she missed him and worried because he might be working too hard and going without his proper food and sleep.

That evening she waited eagerly for his return, but lighting-up time came with no sign of him. Suspecting he might have gone straight to brigade headquarters, she slipped on a padded jacket and hurried over there herself. By the light of a gasoline lamp in the courtyard, men were busily preparing for the sowing: soaking the seeds in warm water, adding insecticide, mending drills and harrows. They talked and laughed as they worked. Mrs. Ho heard Pan Yu-hsi, who added up the work-points, tell Tien Kuei: "You're to help the Old Stager tomorrow. Be prepared for the

fur to fly. Just put one foot out of line and he'll give you a lick with the rough edge of his tongue."

"I've no doubt he'll keep me on my toes," said Tien. "We had plenty of bashings from him out at the reservoir. If some little thing went wrong with a tool and you didn't repair it at once, the Old Stager wouldn't let you get away with it. Why, before coming back he lit into anyone who didn't wipe the mud off his pickaxe and shovel or stow them just where he wanted."

"I'll bet he had a row with everyone there."

"Pretty nearly. But it's lucky he went. If not for him, half our gear would have broken down. It's tough digging there — nothing but stones."

Mrs. Ho understood from the way they spoke that her old man was not there. She was heading for the office when out came Wu with his deputy, Hsu Feng-hsien. Feng-hsien had come to the village as a bride at the Spring Festival, and proved so capable that before very long she was elected assistant brigade leader. At sight of Mrs. Ho she asked:

"What, isn't the Old Stager back yet?"

"I expect he's gone to the theatre," put in Wu Hsiao-chiang, busy mixing insecticide. "Just before we left I heard Chen, the technician, tell him there's an opera in town tonight."

Pan threw in derisively:

"The rest of us are killing ourselves with work but the Old Stager's taking it easy. He's gone to the opera!" Pan had his knife into Ho and never lost a chance of running him down.

Feng-hsien turned anxiously to Brigade Leader Wu. "If he's really gone to town, who's to sow those fifty *mou* tomorrow?"

"He can't have gone," replied Wu confidently. "He knows how much depends on the sowing."

"D'you know who's playing?" asked Wu Hsiao-chiang. "It's Niu Kuei-ying from Taiyuan!"

The brigade leader's heart sank and he thought: "That's torn it. He won't be back tonight."

The Old Stager had a passion for the opera and was devoted to two actresses. One was Mao Mao-tan. Her death kept him out of the theatre for some years, till after liberation he conceived a great admiration for Niu Kuei-ying. If either of these actresses was on, you could not drag Ho away — not even if his house was

on fire. If you dared to criticize the way they sang, you were in for a dressing down, if not a fight. "Bah! A fat lot you understand! Get out of my way!"

Since Mrs. Ho knew her husband's weakness, once she heard Niu Kuei-ying was acting she turned to leave, muttering, "He'll not be able to tear himself away. It'll be the early hours before he's back."

Meanwhile Feng-hsien was urging Wu: "Send someone to fetch him! Or ring up Chengkuan Commune and ask them to look for him in the theatre."

"What if they find him?" retorted Wu. "Nine oxen couldn't drag him away." He looked her squarely in the eyes. "Don't think I'm joking!" Thereupon he related an episode from the days when Ho was working for Landlord Pan. One day the landlord made Ho drive him into town to see the doctor. When he was ready to go home, there was no sign of Ho. Hearing someone say that Mao Mao-tan was playing in the Lu Family's Ancestral Temple, he went there to have a look and found his groom in the crowd; but Ho refused to budge till the show was over. The landlord swore at him, whereupon Ho flared up and bellowed: "Find someone else to work for you. I'm through!" Landlord Pan had to humble himself and wait for the end, for he could not easily have replaced such a capable and hard-working hired hand.

When Feng-hsien had heard this, she gave up her first scheme but grumbled: "I've never known anything like it! Even if he enjoys the opera he shouldn't neglect the sowing!"

Mrs. Ho went home to bed. At the first crow of the cock she scrambled up to light the stove and cook rice. Her husband should be back any moment — yet there was still no sign of him. She began to worry, to grow angry too, and kept up a steady grumbling under her breath. The sun was beginning to rise behind the hills when heavy footsteps sounded in the yard and looking out of the window she saw the Old Stager. His beard was shaggier and his tall figure rather stooped under the bedding roll on his back as he trudged in. Mrs. Ho's first gladness had given way to annoyance. She greeted him with a black look and snapped:

"So you're back at last! It's a wonder you don't make your home in the theatre!"

Dumping his bedding roll on the *kang*, Ho retorted: "Are you raving? I didn't get to see the opera — worse luck!"

"Where have you been then?"

"Some confounded team had dumped its crates. . . ."

"So you spent half the night putting them away, I suppose? Trust you to waste your time on some niggling nothing."

She was right: he had spent half the night clearing up for that team. This is what had happened: Before leaving the reservoir yesterday, he had decided to go to the theatre. He would not let it interfere with the next day's sowing. The last to leave the work shed, he felt he ought to have a look round the site to make sure that all the tools had been put away. He found nothing left outside, but a crumbling cave near by was heaped with crates and carrying-poles. Rain from the hill above was seeping through the fissures in the rock, so that even if the roof did not cave in the crates were liable to rust and rot. He hurried back to headquarters to report this before setting off for town; but the only people left were three old men, one of whom was an invalid. All the rest had gone back to their villages to help with the sowing. There was nothing for it but to stay behind and help the two other able-bodied men to move the stuff. Swearing and grumbling, he worked half the night. By then it was too late for the theatre and he had a short sleep in their office, hurrying home before dawn to face an angry wife.

After some scathing remarks, Mrs. Ho poured her husband water to wash his face. Then she started nagging at him again. "You just can't keep your nose out of other people's business — as bad as a terrier after rats, you are! How many work-points will you get for wearing yourself out last night?"

"Can you think of nothing but work-points?" he retorted, squatting down to wash his face.

"Stubborn as a mule, that's you," grumbled his wife. "Others whet the blade of the knife, you whet the back. Don't talk about work-points, then; but who's to know you worked all night? Who'll thank you?"

Drying his face on his girdle, the Old Stager scowled. "What would *you* do? Bang a copper basin to wake the whole village?"

"Oh, well, have it your own way. You're always right. . . ." She cut short her tirade when she saw him lift the lid of the pan to fill his bowl with rice. She grabbed the ladle from him. "Wait a bit! I've some noodles for you."

"Hurry up, then. I've things to do."

"Can't be all that important." Intentionally, she kept quiet about sowing the high-yield plot. "Everything can wait till you've had a drink and a good sleep."

"Who's to sow the land while I sleep? What d'you suppose we stopped work on the reservoir for?"

"Look at yourself in the mirror — you're all in. Even frogs have to stop hopping once in a while. Men are made of flesh, not iron. All right, the sowing's important, but the land can do without you for once and not run to seed."

More exasperated than ever, Ho seized the ladle and helped himself to rice, muttering: "Backward talk — that's all you're good for."

With an angry snort, she cried: "I'm not fit to hold a candle to you, the great Old Stager! Put the commune before your own home, then, I don't care! You waste a whole night over niggling nothings, and people say you were at the theatre. . . ."

Eager to be off sowing, away from her nagging, Ho picked up his bowl and gave his mind to eating.

Apart from going to see Niu Kuei-ying, the Old Stager put his whole heart into his work. He was the oldest rank-and-file member of the village collective, having joined the co-op in 1952 when it was first set up. Others of his age who had joined at the same time were now administrative officers, brigade leaders, heads of side lines or chairmen of different districts. . . . He was the only ordinary commune member, and hence his name Old Stager.

It wasn't that Ho had never held any post. In the summer of '54 he had been elected team leader, but in less than ten days he succeeded in antagonizing pretty well the whole of his team. He knew all there was to know about farming and was thorough and painstaking into the bargain. But he had the devil's own temper and would let fly if a job didn't measure up to his standards. If the girls hoed a field rather carelessly, he saw red. Presently he would explode: "Call that hoeing? Trampling the seedlings, more like!" He was always getting across folk in this way. At last he handed in his resignation — not on his life was he going to remain team leader. No one could talk him out of this decision, and knowing how pig-headed the old fellow was they put another man on the job. After that the Old Stager held no responsible post but made all the co-op's affairs his own concern, what his wife called "whetting the back of the knife." Yet because of the initiative he showed, he was awarded the title of model worker.

While eating now, he was thinking over this sowing, pretty sure he'd be asked to sow the high-yield plot. He knew that fifty *mou* like the palm of his hand, for this had been Landlord Pan's best plot of land. His sweat had dripped into its good, rich soil; last autumn it had been deep-ploughed and well manured. Yes, tired as he was he must make the very best job he could of the sowing. These thoughts were passing through his mind when Pan Yu-hsi and Feng-hsien came by to fetch him.

"Was Niu Kuei-ying in good form yesterday?" Pan gave a mocking laugh.

Ho flared up at that. Scorning to justify himself, he growled: "What! Is going to the theatre forbidden? Why does the state run opera companies, then?"

"Talk like that cuts no ice with me!" retorted Pan. "We're rushed off our feet with the sowing, but you think fit to go and see a show!"

Ho's cheeks burned, his neck swelled, he was spoiling for a fight. Feng-hsien made haste to interpose: "Forget it! Eat up quickly and come to the fields. That fifty *mou* of high-yield land is waiting to be sown."

"Let him have the morning off, Feng-hsien!" put in Mrs. Ho. "Last night. . . ."

"He's tired out after the theatre last night," sneered Pan. "We were up late too preparing for the sowing. Suppose everybody took the morning off?"

In a towering rage, Ho bellowed: "I'm not coming — let's see what you can do about it!"

Feng-hsien, highly indignant, protested: "That's not right, Old Stager! It's bad enough going to a show when we're so short of hands; now you won't help at all — for shame!"

"Come on," said Pan. "We'll see the brigade leader."

"The brigade leader can't eat me!" shouted Ho, and flung himself down on the *kang*.

Who should arrive then but Brigade Leader Wu himself. He asked what the rumpus was.

"Oh, nothing," said Pan. "He's too tired to work after the show last night — so he's downed tools!"

"That's not right!" chimed in Feng-hsien.

"Is that all?" rejoined Wu calmly. "Well, if he's tired let him sleep. It doesn't matter."

"Who'll sow that plot?" demanded Feng-hsien hotly.

"Tien Kuei can start on it, it doesn't matter. Let's leave Brother Ho to have a good rest."

Once out of the gate, Feng-hsien protested sharply: "Uncle Wu, you didn't handle that right!"

"No?" said Wu. "What should I have done?"

"You're too easy-going by far. You should have pointed out his fault, or at least reasoned with him."

"Quite true — except that you don't understand him. He's probably sticking at home because someone's put his back up. He'll get over it presently." Wu paused, then went on: "If he's really made up his mind not to work in the fields, you could threaten to cut off his head without budging him — finding fault or reasoning would be quite useless."

The brigade leader knew what he was talking about. A hundred men could not make old Ho change his mind, not even if they came with a mandate from Heaven. He would turn a deaf ear till he had a change of heart himself. Ho had worked for ten years and more for Landlord Pan, and during the land reform of 1947 dozens of people urged him to speak out and expose the landlord's crimes — but nothing doing. Comrade Chang of the

Land-reform Team reasoned with him for two days, but still Ho said not a word. He did not even attend the first meeting that was held to oppose the landlord, but drank his tot of wine and curled up in his quilt to sleep. That evening the landlord's concubine slipped in to give him a hundred silver dollars. The next day he took this money to the meeting, charged on to the platform and really tore the landlord to pieces. After that he gave the other poor peasants a lead in tracking down the scoundrel's property and grain and in marking out the land. . . . He had suddenly turned into an activist, ready to stay up till midnight or go without meals. Not long after the land reform things became rather tense, when the Kuomintang forces prepared to make a come-back. It was rumoured that the warlord Yen Hsi-shan was sending troops, and all who had taken anything belonging to the landlord would lose their heads. Not a few of the villagers restored their title-deeds and other property in secret to the landlord. Old Ho's neighbours urged him to do the same, and his wife sobbed and pleaded with him all day long to take this safe way out — but he would not hear of it. "Chop off my head!" he fumed. "They can cut me into a thousand pieces first! I'm not handing back what we've won, not till the sun rises in the west." As things turned out, Yen Hsi-shan never came, so those who had returned property took it back again. This was one example. Another was joining the co-operative. In the winter of 1951, the village discussed forming a co-op and plenty of people advised old Ho to join, till even his wife was in two minds about it. But the old man firmly refused. The next spring, however, not long after the co-op got going, of his own accord he tethered his donkey in its stable. That year, as ill luck would have it, the harvest was poor and he made much less than previously on his own. His wife kept nagging at him, urging him to back out. "Wait till I'm dead," said Ho, "then you can back out!"

That's the way he was, a real character.

Today Mrs. Ho saw him lying in a temper on the *kang*. She knew quite well he had not been near the theatre. The reason she hadn't told Feng-hsien was that she wanted her old man to have a good sleep before going out to the fields. As soon as the others had left, she fried some eggs and heated the wine prepared the day before.

"Here!" she called. "Get up and eat. Then you can sleep."

There was no answer and, thinking he had dozed off, she fetched a quilt to put over him. He sat up so abruptly that she nearly fell over. Bounding off the *kang*, the Old Stager made for the door.

"Where are you going?" she called.

"To sow that plot. Can't have Tien Kuei messing it up!"

"Pan Yu-hsi will be saying you don't know your own mind!" she taunted.

On his way to the gate, Ho retorted: "He's not my master!"

Watching him make off, Mrs. Ho gave a sigh and muttered:

"I ask you, what can you do with a man like that?"

Translated by Gladys Yang
Woodcuts by Yao Chen-huan

LO SHU

The Salt Worker

The night was still, the moon hanging high in a vast, deep, cloudless sky. There was no wind. Nobody was moving about and no dog barking. The salt works was still, so still that the occasional croaking of frogs by the pond carried loudly through the darkness.

But the works was not asleep. The sources of its life—the ovens and wells—were turning out the salt faster than ever.

Salt wells sprawled all over the hill. Every shed seemed full of moving wheels and pulleys. The men's faces were grim and they worked in sullen silence, as if angry with someone or too tired to speak. Yet all shared the same impatience, the same longing: Let time fly quickly, let the barrels soon be filled with brine so that they could change shifts and fling themselves down on straw pallets to sleep till dawn.

Yet Old Melon's pallet was empty.

After peering out of the shed, Huo-sheng sat down on the bench and heaved a deep sigh. The moon had just risen and the barrels were far from full, yet his eyes. . . .

"I simply can't keep my eyes open! . . ."

Small Three, not yet sixteen, plodded behind the two oxen with a whip in his hand. Whenever they slowed down he cracked his whip, crying, "Giddup! . . ."

"Aren't you sleepy, Small Three? I don't know what's come over me tonight."

"Do what I do!"

He stuck two mud pellets on a sliver of bamboo and propped up his eyelids with these.

"If you do that often, you'll go blind."

"That would suit me fine. People give food and money to blind beggars."

"What kind of talk is that!"

"It's true. Old Melon's young brother tried begging and died of hunger, yet his old mother who can hardly move hasn't starved to death!"

So they talked about Old Melon's mother, the blind widow. . . .

Old Melon worked at this salt well with the two of them. But tonight nobody knew where he had gone. Perhaps he was drinking at the village tavern, or out robbing somebody's fields again.

The maize was ripening, pumpkins were mellowing, there were plenty of crabs in the stream to be caught with a light, to say nothing of the bamboo shoots in the woods.

The thought of cooked vegetables woke Small Three up so that his eyelids needed no further support. He asked Huo-sheng eagerly:

"What d'you suppose is keeping him all this time?"

Huo-sheng burst out laughing. Small Three had just been running down Old Melon's mother and now he was longing for food from the old woman's son.

Rather sheepishly, Small Three denied any such intention.

"I often saw her bathe in the mud pool but I never threw stones at her. Heaven knows,"—his whip pointed to the roof of the shed—"when she lost one bowl of rice, Old Melon said I was behind it."

"Oh, yes? Well, when she was catching lice by the hedge, who ran off with all her clothes?"

"You talking about me?"

Huo-sheng chuckled.

This thrust went home and Small Three had no more to say. The shed fell silent again.

The lamp-wick now was so black with snuff that a few feet away from it all was in darkness.

Opposite the empty pallet lay an old palsied cow whose discharges had dirtied the ground. Her breath came in painful gasps as she gazed first at the men, then at the light, with bloodshot eyes, wistful and yearning, that seemed bulging from their sockets. But the men had no sympathy for her, nothing but disgust at the stink.

In the distance dogs started barking, then humming was heard. At last footsteps approached outside.

Somebody in the next shed swore:

"Turning up at midnight again! Dirty dog. . . ."

The newcomer paid no attention but strolled in humming.

Old Melon was empty-handed. Small Three's heart sank.

"About time for your shift. Do you expect us to do your job while you fool about outside?"

"All right, I know."

His face was pale—evidence that he was not drunk.

There was a streak of dried blood on Old Melon's forehead. He looked quite calm, though very tired, as if he had just finished some strenuous job.

"What's up, Old Melon?" asked Huo-sheng. "What have you been doing? Where did you hurt yourself?"

"Hurt myself?"

"There's blood on your face."

He rubbed the place with his hand, which he then wiped on his clothes. Not looking at them, he said:

"Digging bamboo shoots, I jabbed my hands. Must have smeared some blood on my face."

He walked away to lie down on his pallet, where his snores soon mingled with the hoarse breathing of the cow.

Little by little Small Three slowed down and flourished his whip less vigorously, while the pulleys rolled more lazily too, as if falling asleep.

Huo-sheng was nodding as he sat there, drooling on his clothes, almost forgetting the barrel of brine that was about to brim over.

"Hey, dad! . . . The ox! . . ." yelled Old Melon, waking with a start.

He was lifting a bowl of delicious beef soup to his mouth, when suddenly the soup turned into his father's rotting corpse

and the bowl into a thin wooden coffin from a big crack in which pink blood and pus were oozing. The next instant the coffin became a big yellow ox, charging fiercely at him.

"What a fool you are! Is your father's ghost dragging you off again?"

Old Melon huddled close to the lamp, his face pale. "Can you smell anything?" he asked after a long time.

"Only that stinking cow! You're dreaming—wake up!"

He strode over abruptly to the cow and kicked her with all his might.

"You! You won't let us eat you even when you're dead."

"Why kick the poor beast when she's dying? What harm has she done you?"

Old Melon gave the cow a few more vicious kicks before lying down again. But he lay with open eyes till the time for his shift.

His old man, his blind mother, his young brother and the cow . . . all were haunting him and he could not drive them away.

"I've got indigestion," he thought. "You can't sleep after eating too much."

He seemed to smell the rank yet not too nauseous odour of raw meat. Something swelled in his breast, suffocating him.

II

It was Old Melon's turn to draw water.

Although he had slept so little, he was not sleepy. He felt something swelling in his breast, suffocating him. He thought again, "Yes, I must have eaten too much."

The ox-driver for this shift was a boy younger than Small Three with short, stumpy legs. Instead of his driving the oxen, they were dragging him along.

Old Melon smiled bitterly, shaking his head. When he first came here, he remembered, he too had short legs and short arms and had run after the oxen.

"How long have you been here, kid?"

"One month."

"Your mam sent you?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I know all right."

The boy smiled ingenuously, wanting to say more. But Old Melon paid no attention and walked out.

Day was breaking. The hills in the east could be seen in a haze.

At the bottom of the valley, the large building housing the salt ovens still crouched in darkness. Only the chimney stood erect in proud isolation, the fire in the ovens still hot.

He was looking round nervously, as if menaced by something. You might think he was looking at that hill where his mother lived. Yet his head was turned in another direction. He seemed like a man who has committed a crime and suspects that spies are lurking in the darkness ready to encircle him as soon as day breaks.

In despair, he leaned his head against a willow. A breeze spattered the dewdrops from the tree on his face, wetting his hair and eyebrows.

"Brother Old Melon!"

A young woman carrying two baskets with jars in them suspended from a carrying-pole had slipped into the shed.

"What is it?"

"Give me a drop of brine! Nobody's here yet. I haven't tasted salt for days. . . ."

"Get out of here!"

"We're old neighbours. . . . I've just passed by your mother's cave. She. . . ."

"She what?"

"She seemed to be up. There was a fire outside and I smelt meat!"

With lips that trembled, Old Melon dashed towards her, swearing:

"You whore, you. . . ."

Scared, she backed away, ready to slip out through the door, when to her surprise Old Melon picked up one of her jars and, instead of dashing it against the ground, filled it with brine.

Disconcerted by this extraordinary behaviour, she did not even thank him but started off with her load in astonishment, looking over her shoulder for fear he might drag her back. He let her go, however.

"The devil! What devils they all are!"

Old Melon looked up to find a pair of luminous eyes in the corner of the shed fixed on him. He was taken aback and walked slowly towards the cow. She was gasping harder than ever, her belly heaving, her distended eyes expressive of misery. Regardless of the dirt, he patted her head.

Rays of morning sunlight slid quietly in through the window with the fresh breeze. Shadows were dispersed. The stench that had hung about the place all night was at last dissipating.

Yet Old Melon felt tenser with the coming of daylight, though he knew it was useless to worry.

With a wry smile he looked at his mates, lying almost on top of the cow dung.

"And we call ourselves men!"

The slops on the ground glittered dark green in the sun. Flies hummed ceaselessly. Shaking his head, he went out for a crate of sand which he scattered gently on the ground.

He sat on a heap of straw and sang softly to himself while the other two snored.

The pickled vegetables and hot steamed rice had lost their usual attraction for him that day. The others, not forgetting to eat, kept stealing glances at him. From time to time they came out with strange ejaculations which they immediately tried to suppress.

The cook in his big apron was washing up in the kitchen. His fat cheeks, red from the fire, quivered as he moved. As usual he was complaining that the kitchen was too small, the men got in his way. But for once Old Melon was not in his way.

"Why are you behind all the rest? What were you up to last night?"

Old Melon only swore beneath his breath.

One of the men pretended to sneeze and asked, "What's that stink? Smells like ox."

"Must be beef. Only beef smells so strong."

Old Melon did not want to hear more of this talk. Eating only half his usual amount, he dumped his bowl and chopsticks in the basin. He was not allowed, however, to go away.

The overseer summoned him.

He caught his breath at the sight of the earthenware jar which his mother used every day lying at the overseer's feet. He fixed his eyes on it. So did the other, smiling as he drummed with long fingers on a small teapot of Chingtehchen porcelain.

"Recognize it, eh? Whose jar is this, Old Melon?"

"My mother's."

"Your trouble is you work too hard," sneered the overseer, glancing around, tapping the ground with his toes as he shook his head. "Your mother's blind, you should help her wash her jar. See how filthy it is."

Old Melon threw back his head and his eyes blazed. But when he saw the middle-aged overseer's face, he lowered his head again and said sullenly:

"I'm a bad son. You go and be a son to her."

The overseer sprang up in anger and boxed his ears.

"Crazy dog, you! You ate that dead ox. And you dare answer back. . . ."

"You'd rather bury it than let people eat it."

Still the same sullen tone.

"You must be mad! That old ox dragged the cart faithfully for twenty years. So I treated him as a human being, didn't cut up his carcass. . . . You dug up the grave and stole the carcass as well . . . that's a serious crime. Your eating it makes it worse. . . ."

Having left the kitchen, Old Melon sat by the field, hugging his knees. He was a little ashamed of what he had done. Probably the ox did deserve to be buried entire. Because he had cut a big lump off its leg, it would chase him in his dreams.

"He worked faithfully. . . ."

His old man had stoked the ovens for more than twenty years, but what of his corpse?—like a soggy piece of beancurd!

Old Melon could not help wondering. That box on the ears had jarred him to the depths.

III

Old Melon's real name was Wu-tzu. It was after his brother's death that he was nicknamed Old Melon.

The name signified impotence, cowardice, stupidity. It made him ridiculous, a figure of fun.

One stormy night, the year that he was thirteen, when his father was adding water to the salt cauldron, steam and smoke got into his eyes so that he slipped and fell into the seething white brine.

The same day that his father was buried, his mother took him to a man with horn-rimmed glasses.

"Look, he's strong as a young ox. For his father's sake, take him on!"

Though he protested and was afraid of that place, his mother left him there.

So the lad became a worker. Like so many others living around the salt works, he had no choice but to eat this bowl of "briny rice." There was no other way out.

For the first couple of years he fought against it. Every time he went home, his mother had to beat him to get him to go back.

"You're not a child any more, go on! Where else can you find a job?"

At last he understood and stopped insisting that he wanted to come home.

If you move a plant from the hills to a cold, dark, sunless room, it is bound to wither away. The lad's open, sunny character changed completely. He became afraid of people, and even more afraid of the row of salt cauldrons that kept seething with big white bubbles day and night, the whole year round. He dared not go near these cauldrons.

A ludicrous figure he was, beneath contempt!

He carried no sharp, two-edged dagger, could not shoot birds, dared not gamble or make eyes at other men's wives, and could not lift two hundred catties of coal . . . he had none of the assets, in fact, of the best salt workers.

Among those of no account, Old Melon was of least account.

Though sympathy costs nothing, it is not something to be wasted or given freely. Old Melon was like a willow crate which holds neither soup nor water.

Huo-sheng once said, "If you want to be fed, Old Melon, you've got to be up to the job—this is no place for you. Look at your two shanks, as thin as chicken bones. . . . You'd do better begging like your mother and brother."

He may have taken these taunts to heart but he only sighed, hummed a few bars—and let them pass.

It seemed he had been born to draw salt water for others! Every day he watched the oxen draw brine from the wells, every day he poured the brine into the vats, every day he heard it flowing through the underground pipes to the salt ovens on the slope to be dried out and made into big bags of white salt. And every month he got one dollar from the overseer as his wage, while every day he had three meals of rice with pickled vegetables. Drawing salt water, drinking, eating, sleeping—that was his life.

So Old Melon's face grew paler. His head seemed to grow longer. He walked more and more unsteadily, like a shadow.

The men in the works became colder to him and more on their guard against him.

One winter morning, Old Melon was kicked awake. A peasant family at the foot of the hill insisted that he go there at once. His young brother lay curled up like a homeless dog that had died on the pile of hay outside somebody's house. It had snowed in the night, but not too heavily, so that a thin layer of snow served as his shroud. The mistress of the house, coming out to sweep the snow early in the morning, had discovered the corpse and run screaming in all directions, till the neighbours were aroused and went for Old Melon.

"You heartless brute! I've done you no harm, yet you brought this ill luck on me. I've sons and daughters, I'd have you know! I'm not a young fellow all on my own like you. . . ."

His scrawny hand clawing at the long hair that almost covered his eyes, Old Melon looked from the corpse to the wailing woman and blinked in bewilderment.

"I didn't tell him to lie here."

The woman was not angry but kept on crying. After roaring with laughter, the bystanders consoled her, then asked Old Melon:

"What will you do with him?"

"I'll bury him in the ground."

"I should hope so—you can't bury him in the clouds!" They laughed harder than ever. Old Melon looked at them in bewilderment.

That night Old Melon got drunk in the village tavern, and on his return quarrelled with Small Three, his first quarrel! Someone asserted that the money for drinks had come from the clothes given for laying out his brother. The donor of the clothes sent for Old Melon.

"Shame on you, stripping the dead to buy drinks!"

Old Melon did not deny this but answered evasively:

"It was kind of you anyway. . . ."

"See here: I gave it to the dead, not to you for drinks!"

"I couldn't carry the coffin myself . . . had to treat the fellows who helped."

After this, Old Melon became the laughing-stock of the whole salt works. But it seemed to make no difference to him at all. He still received one dollar each month, drew salt water, drank, slept and sang ballads.

Only his name was changed. And he frequented the village tavern more often, and was often found asleep among the graves.

Nobody could understand what drew Old Melon so often to the graveyard. Why should he go there when it was neither a day for sacrifice nor any festival? No one believed for a moment that he was putting himself out to protect the graves from wind and rain or from the wild dogs that dug up bones to gnaw. . . . He must be short of money for drinks, eager for some small windfall: a piece of cloth, a shirt or anything the dogs might unearth.

Once he was followed. The man following him was smiling.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Old Melon.

"Just killing time. I came to see what you're up to."

Old Melon said not a word but made off at once, never to return to the graveyard again.

IV

The rosy sky at the horizon held the deep emerald hills in a gentle embrace. The river at the foot of the mountain glinted strangely as it flowed downstream, wave after wave.

Fields stretched away into the distance on the other side of the river, and like black dots crows congregated there. A man's approach did not frighten them away—they merely flew up into the air to flock back again presently.

Old Melon, a crate for crabs in one hand, emerged from one side of the fields. He was heading upstream. The long hair on his forehead was ruffled, his shirt was unbuttoned. Although it was not hot, he was sweating profusely. Even his eyes seemed a little red.

He paused hesitantly from time to time before striding on again. And more than once he stopped to look around.

No peasants were left in the fields. Before him lay the darkening mountains and water, behind the stretch of fields. The crows were cawing and the river gurgling.

Fading from sight behind was the salt works, whose wheels and pulleys could no longer be heard. Only smoke was still clearly visible in the sky; but it formed a dense black cloud and there was no telling from which household it had come.

He had expected the bank to be deserted, but now he thought he could see a shadowy figure.

He strained his eyes and made out a stumpy fellow heading his way. That made him a little angry and nervous too, till he remembered his crab crate and felt reassured. He squatted down on the bank and began to search among the pebbles.

As he lifted the stones he saw several crabs but felt no strong urge to catch them. He took only one, a very small one.

The shadowy figure drew near. He pretended not to see it. But he had already recognized Small Three.

Small Three was more friendly than the others. Old Melon had not seen him for several days and he looked taller by a head. Old Melon stood up.

"Hey, Old Melon, what are you doing here? Why do you never come to see us since you chucked up the job?"

"I'm catching crabs."

"Got many?"

"Only one."

"But I saw you come down here quite a while ago. Have you only caught one all this time?" Seeing a crab beside him, Small Three pounced on it. "Here you are. . . . There's another, and another!"

Small Three put all three crabs in the crate.

"Heavens! You call that catching crabs? You don't catch them even when you see them! What are you up to?"

"You catch them then!"

Old Melon threw the crate on the ground. Small Three stared in astonishment. He felt Old Melon had changed.

"Are you crazy? It's the first time I've seen you in such a temper. In the few days since you left us you've changed so much!"

This would make a good story. He started bounding off, only turning to taunt Old Melon:

"You don't dare catch crabs! Afraid your hands will get pinched and bleed or hurt!"

When Small Three had made off, laughing, Old Melon threw a stone at his back. "Young devil! You're no better than the rest."

Old Melon went on, leaving the salt works further and further behind. But the smoke was still there to be seen every time he looked back, as if it would dog him for ever, watching him as if he were a criminal.

"You! . . ."

Old Melon shook his fist and clenched his teeth. A couple of steps further on, he growled again:

"You!"

This time he shook his fist not at the smoke but at a face in the smoke wearing horn-rimmed spectacles, and at all the other faces looming before him. He clenched his fist again and went through the motion of hurling those countless lives in his clutch to the ground, to bury them deep under the earth.

As if he had really done such a glorious deed, he broke out in a fresh sweat, not from exhaustion but from deep satisfaction. Feeling thirsty, he lay down by the river to drink, then splashed

his face with water. The sudden chill sobered him. He felt tired, wanted to rest.

He sat on a rock. The reeds were in full bloom. A gust of wind set their long leaves swaying and rustling. The sound of the rapids in the distance held a note of sadness and futility. He felt rather cast down.

"Grin and bear it—no use being angry. . . ."

Usually what followed this was the reflection "But it's tough getting boxed on the ears." Abruptly he remembered the overseer.

He shivered, feeling countless eyes watching him. Rising quickly, he walked off again. The wind blew into his face, his shirt was open, his chest thrown out. He was filled with strength and courage. He even felt taller.

The further he went the denser the reeds became. The banks were covered with them, nothing but reeds.

He stood still and looked round but, to his disappointment, there was nothing else to be seen.

"I can't have heard wrong, surely? It should be here."

He threw the crab crate into the river and plunged into the thick of the reeds. With the whole of Nature, he too was lost in darkness.

Once in there where the reeds were thickest, Old Melon's heart started throbbing as if somebody were trying to murder him.

"Done for!"

Nobody came here except during the season for cutting reeds. Yet his bamboo pole had gone. . . . Who had taken it? His axe and pick placed under the big stone had gone too. Who could have guessed his plan?

On this axe and pick he had spent one and a half months' wages, the last dollar and a half he had earned in all these years. With them he meant to get his own back. More, with them he would go far away to make a living as a woodcutter. He stood there as if dazed in the shallow water, resting his heavy, drooping head on his hands.

A large salt junk at anchor ten feet or more away seemed to be sneering at him, scoffing at his defeat.

"If you're afraid to look for them, you're done for!" So saying, he groped for the anchor, untied the cable and swam to the boat.

He knew this junk, had known it indeed for years and knew everything aboard it just as well as his old work shed and his mother's cave. He would look for his axe and pick in the cabin. The cabin was full of salt, lump salt as well as powdered salt, worth a whole packet of money!

"It would be a pity to sink this lot. I can put it to good use."

With a grin he took down the pole on top of the awning. The iron tip of the pole clashed against the pebbles on the river bed as he pushed off with an effort. But once the junk was in midstream Old Melon laid down the pole and crouched by the rudder, guiding the boat as it sped rapidly down river.

The salt works was left further and further behind. The reeds by the river were soon lost to sight. The same moon shone down upon the rushing water and the ceaselessly smoking salt works. The works was nothing to him now, but. . . .

"Mam will cry over this. What's she going to live on?"

He felt a pang, a moment's uncertainty. To go back was out of the question. The bank would be crowded now with men, lanterns and torches. . . .

"They'll never suspect me. Old Melon would never dare do such a thing!"

He hoped Small Three would say something to give them a clue. Failing that, they might guess the truth from his axe and pick.

It is no small thing, the loss of a boatload of salt. The whole works was in a hubbub. The overseer, nursing his small Ching-tehchen teapot, spent all his time thinking it over.

"This was a clever job—the work of a gang or some wily old thief, that's certain!"

This was the end of night shipments for the salt works. No one ventured out on the bank once darkness fell, and the peasants went home early too. Obsessed by the idea of a gang of robbers, people paid no attention to Old Melon's disappearance.

Yet as time went by, the two things were linked together and Old Melon's name was on men's lips again. His mother was summoned by the overseer.

"Where has your son gone?"

"How should I know? Our whole family has had to beg for a living. He must be dead like his brother on a pile of straw."

"Not he!"

"What do you mean?"

"They say he's the one who stole that load of salt."

"How dare he do such a wicked thing? I don't believe it!"

"No use covering up for him. I'm holding you in his place. . . ."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm going to lock you up till your son comes back."

"Lock me up?"

She blinked her opalescent, sightless eyes and rapped the ground with her stick, as if pondering a problem of vital importance. Quite abruptly she laughed, a rather malicious laugh.

"Very well. Shall I stay here?"

The overseer, highly offended, kicked her and roared:

"Get out! You aren't even fit to be detained. You and your whole family! . . ."

Tapping the ground with her stick, the blind woman groped her way out step by step, murmuring:

"Our whole family, our whole family. . . ."

Translated by Chang Su

Aunt Liu

I was awakened that day not by the songs the cowherds sang as they drove their oxen up the slope, nor by one of our household speaking loudly to my mother who was hard of hearing. A

strange, rough voice exclaiming: "Why, she's grown up now!" woke me.

Rather annoyed I opened my eyes to see who was in the room. Standing by my bed was a shabbily-dressed middle-aged woman with a somewhat flat, pockmarked face under wispy hair. Her lips parted in a fearful toothless smile.

I felt I had seen this unattractive, ugly face before. But I could not place her.

I gazed at her silently, trying to find some record of her file in my mind.

"I'm Aunt Liu. . . . I knew you'd have forgotten Aunt Liu," she said as if reading my thoughts. "It's eight years since I saw you last. And how you have grown! I wouldn't have recognized you if I had met you on the street."

"What? You're Aunt Liu? The Aunt Liu who took care of me?"

I jumped down from my bed, my face flushed with excitement.

A child easily remembers trifles but is apt to forget what ought to be remembered. How could I have forgotten this woman who had once been so good to me? What an ungrateful little creature!

She backed away as I went up to her. Behind her was a desk where I did my lessons when I came home at week-ends. Bumping against it, she upset the vase of bright summer daisies on it. Quite put out, she hastily tried to repair the damage while I did my best to stop her.

"You. . . ."

I meant to say something to put her at ease but my mind was in a whirl too. I had no idea whether to say "you used to be" or "you are." Maybe what I meant was, "You are entirely different from before!"

Yes, she had certainly changed. She used to feel uneasy only in the presence of my father and mother. Why should she behave like this now in front of me? Wasn't I the little girl she loved and cared for like a mother? Nevertheless, I knew if she had sat down on a stool and offered to hold me on her knee, so that she could croon the ballads my mother had forbidden, tell blood-curdling stories that might mark a young mind,

or ask me to hug her and kiss her red pockmarked face, I would have refused without a moment's hesitation.

She was not to blame. Neither was I. Time and hateful conventions had made a wide gap between us.

It was awkward staring at each other in utter silence. I felt I must find something appropriate to say. Mother's arrival saved the situation.

She was in a good mood that day and chuckled as she walked in.

"What a hostess. . . . Why don't you ask Liu to sit down?"

I didn't realize until then that I was sitting on my bed while Liu stood in the middle of the room.

"Look, she has grown taller than I," said mother. Pointing at the two plaited knots on the back of my head, she continued, "These seem to be the craze with middle-school students! They look quite nice, don't they?"

Liu had not forgotten that she needed only to nod, whatever mother said. But perhaps she had not noticed what mother was saying. Her eyes scrutinized me from head to toe. Was she looking for some trace of the little girl of eight years ago?

"You hardly know each other now!" Liu's scrutiny made mother smile. "One of you has grown up while the other is getting old. How time flies!" Then she said to me, "You ought to be glad. You never expected Liu to turn up in this valley hidden in the mountains, did you? She must have had a time of it finding us. Do you remember the day I fired her? She had just bought you a lot of water-chestnuts and some lotus roots. I sent her away because she was too fond of drinking."

Mother's bluntness amazed me. Fancy coming out openly like that with the ill turn she had done Aunt Liu!

The mention of water-chestnuts and lotus roots did something to me. I tried to avoid the two pairs of eyes fastened on me.

A gust of wind swept the palm leaves against my window. I pulled one off, tore it to shreds and scattered them over the floor.

Suddenly I thought of a question.

"How did you find out that we had moved to this place?"

"I asked! You hadn't crossed the country — it was easy to find you."

She was still so outspoken and sharp.

I was going to ask more questions when mother sent for a bottle of wine which she held out to Liu.

"I know this is what you like best," she said. "Go and have a drink in the kitchen. This is good seasoned wine, so don't overdo it. Leave some to take home and share with your husband."

When she was gone mother told me that Liu had married a man who had seven-tenths of a *mou* of land in the hills and who worked as a sedan-chair carrier. She didn't remember where Liu was living now but she sympathized with this ill-fated woman.

I knew very little of Liu's past. Someone might have told me, but it had left no impression. Now mother told me the whole story again.

When she was fifteen, Liu was tricked into leaving her home and sold as a maid to a rich family. One night, she had too much to drink and was raped by her master, a man of over forty. When she was found to be pregnant, they drove her out of the black gate flanked on both sides by stone lions. The baby was born in a privy by the street and died three days after birth. A good-hearted scavenger cleared away the grubs around the little corpse, wrapped it up in a tattered mat and buried it for her. Thereafter she had managed by mending and taking in washing or by standing at the outskirts of the town and stretching out her hand for alms. Sometimes she sold porridge in the lanes. In the end she contrived to be taken on by us as a servant. This was a remarkable opportunity for her. How good life must have seemed!

If she had not been so fond of tippling, mother wouldn't have sent her away.

This fondness for drink was her only fault. And my mother was a kind-hearted woman, I knew. . . . But I recalled the day before Liu left us eight years ago. . . .

It was a summer day just like this one. Thunder was rumbling in the distance. I was watching the yellow ants fight the black ants under a Judas tree. Behind the bamboo door curtain mother was talking to some woman and her voice sounded angry.

Just then Liu came through the gate. You could see at a glance that she had been drinking again. In her hands were two thick

white lotus roots and a package wrapped in a lotus leaf. The pitcher hanging from her arm obviously contained rice wine.

Giving the package to me she said:

"I have brought you something good. Eat the water-chestnuts first while I wash and slice the lotus roots for you."

Mother told me not to eat the water-chestnuts.

When Liu returned with a plate for me, the woman who had been speaking with my mother rushed up to her, jabbed at her forehead and said fiercely:

"You're fired. Pack your things and look for another job. I've done all I could to help you but you just don't try to make good. You never stop drinking that stinking yellow liquor! You've brought this on your own head."

Liu said nothing, just urged me to eat the lotus roots.

I could do nothing but accept the plate which I offered to my mother. She was embroidering a white silk pillow-case. The bright flowers made her angry face look much sterner than usual. She slammed the plate down on a table and froze me with a look. Although she didn't lay any blame on me I was already trembling. More for Liu's sake than my own.

That night at dinner Liu didn't wait on us and the strange thing was mother didn't send for her either.

I sneaked to the kitchen as soon as mother's back was turned. The kitchen door was closed. I dared not knock. Peeping in through a crack, I called Liu softly.

All the servants were sitting round the table, a winecup in front of each. The pitcher Liu had brought was in the middle. They were eating and drinking merrily, unaware that outside the door a little girl was gazing so lovingly at one among them. Liu's face was red, her sleeves were rolled up high and her tunic was unbuttoned, her throat bare. This was the first time I had seen her in such a state and I was puzzled by her strange behaviour. Later on I realized that since she would be eating our rice no longer she felt she could let herself go. To hell with the rules that had bound her for three whole years! She would do as she pleased on the eve of her departure.

"Ask someone to put in a word for you. The mistress may let you stay," suggested one.

"Working for others, you have to do as they say."

"There's no need. No sense in trying to stay when you're not wanted. Servants have one foot inside the door and the other one out. You can step in if things go well or out if they don't. If one family doesn't want you, go to another. With able hands and feet you can make a living anywhere. I've begged for my food before now, what have I to fear? . . ."

Afraid mother might be looking for me, I hurried back and tugged at the hem of her coat.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"Mother! . . . Aunt Liu! . . ." I had to repeat myself twice before she understood.

"I have told her to go tomorrow. I don't want to leave you in the care of a woman like that. I'll find someone else to look after you, someone kind." Then she remarked, half to herself: "As a matter of fact, she's a good honest creature. The only trouble is the way she drinks. I'm sorry for her, though. . . . I'll cancel what she owes us, give her an extra month's pay and a suit of clothes."

Next morning I woke up to find Liu gone. And since then eight years had passed.

I had never dreamt that she would come to see us. I was pleasantly surprised and rather touched.

If mother had not dismissed her, she would not have become so bedraggled and haggard-looking. But I could not lay the blame entirely on mother.

I hoped that mother would let her stay with us.

When Liu came back after her meal I asked her, "Did you have enough?"

"A very good meal, thank you. It's two years since I've had white rice."

"Are you doing all right?"

"Well, I manage somehow. Whether you get on well or badly, it's all the same. Even if you don't get on well you must go on living."

I was silent for some time and then explained,

"I mean, do you have enough to eat?"

"Of course not! He brings home barely enough to feed himself. I live on that plot we have in the hills. I gather firewood every

day to make ends meet. When there's no firewood I sometimes do coolie work. I can manage a load of seventy or eighty catties."

"Is your husband good to you?"

"Not bad. . . . Since I left you I have had three men. Every one of them beat me. When I found I could not hold my own with the last of them I ran away and married this one. . . ."

"Does he beat you? . . ." I asked quickly.

"What do you think? All men beat their wives!" She smiled at me as if to say, "Doesn't your father beat your mother too?" Then she said, "I can always run away when it gets too much for me or I can't hold my own."

It was growing dark and she seemed anxious to go.

"It's getting dark and it looks like rain. I still have more than five *li* to go. I'm going to raise two fat hens when I get back; I want you and the mistress to come for a meal in the autumn when it's cooler." Then she shook her head. "But my place is no better than a pigsty—you won't come."

"Stay a bit longer. I've something else to ask you. Do you mean to go on like this? Why not find a job?"

"What job can I find? Even your family doesn't want a beggar like me. . . . Besides, I'm used to running wild and my hands are too rough for delicate work. It's better this way. . . . Just take life as it comes. After all, I won't starve."

I had nothing more to say.

Unable to make her stay longer, mother gave her a peck of white rice and what remained of the bottle of wine.

Soon after that I went to study in the provincial town. Mother never told me whether she visited Liu or ate the fat hens specially raised for us.

When I went home the following year, I was told that Liu had left her husband again. No one knew where she had drifted.

I believe she is living still and with all my heart I wish her well, for she understands life.

Translated by Yu Fan-chin

KUO HSIAO-CHUAN

Two Poems

Country Roads

Ah, country roads, like endless
lines of long bridges, starting from our
feet then running into the horizon; tall trees
standing like columns, then spread out
before one, the great green earth.

Ah, the old country roads like strands
of silk, reflecting gold, threading cities,
villages, high land and low like strings
of precious stones together, building
this lovely land of ours.

Kuo Hsiao-chuan, one of our best-known modern poets, was born in a north China village in Jehol in 1919, and started writing in 1936. In 1937 he joined the War of Resistance Against Japan and began his career as a revolutionary poet. *Country Roads* recalls the path he has traversed as a revolutionary. *Sugar-cane — Kaoliang*, written last year during a tour of south China, expresses his love for the lush sugar-cane which the commune members grow in abundance in south China today, and his longing for the ubiquitous forest-like *kaoliang* which sheltered the guerrillas in their fight against the Japanese invaders in the old days in north China. His chief collections of poems are *Plunge into Fiery Struggle, Under the Moon, The Two Capitals,* and a trilogy *The General.*

2.

Ah, those country roads that wind like
the wild Yellow River, so many
bends, each bend meeting many a storm.

Ah, country roads like mountain gullies,
rocks and grass embedded even more than
waves of the Yellow River; travellers
of old and of today all have tasted their roughness.

3.

Ah, the country roads beside which
I was born, on which as I left
my mother's breast, I learnt to walk!
Had they not helped me, so would I still
have remained backward, undeveloped.

Ah, those country roads, along which
come delicious local products
all kinds of wares; down which
men and women, heroes of the ages have
tramped; for the walkers a great future,
for the stayers in the valleys
a simple end at home.

4.

Ah, country roads, I love your long
broad vistas; the way one is forced
to wind with you around cliffs
meet sudden storms; just to
dance on a polished floor, what
kind of a life is that?

Ah, country roads, I love your
brightness, your abundance,
your winding and the good earth
you pass through; had one not followed you
through waters and over mountains
how could one start to build
the golden world to come?

Sugar-cane — "Kaoliang"

Sugar-cane
sugar-cane, ah! The south
a forest of it! Why so sweet
a smell for me, yet so austere?
Kaoliang fields, ah! Northern *kaoliang*
why so distant, yet so dear to me?

Our *kaoliang* like this forest
of sugar-cane, scatters shade,
its long leaves waving in the wind
their rustle like the song of
a guitar; *kaoliang* as dear to me
as the cane fields have become,
dew on leaves in sunlight making
the earth bright with each dawn.

The chilly autumn has passed,
the richness of summer comes;
sweetness from cane fields differs
from the tough work on
kaoliang fields; time is like
water flowing from a spring, life as
the waves of the ocean, ever rolling in
relentlessly! Ah, but those distant fields
of *kaoliang*, never had the sweetness of cane!

Youngsters who struggled together,
dear ones of bygone *kaoliang* fields, now
here together in the cane field, let us
recall other days; comrades of wars,
brothers who grew up with me in the north,
would that we could return to the *kaoliang*
demanding a return of our youth!

Do you remember how we once found
as we lived amongst *kaoliang*, how it
was even sweeter than sugar? How once
we stoutly maintained fields of *kaoliang* were
more lovely than either Shanghai or Peking?

Then how once we dreamt a dream
that after victory of the revolution,
stroking white beards, we would travel
all over the south? How once we had one
small wish, that when socialism came we
would smoke three cigarettes a day?

Remember too how we felt, that even were
we killed, at least our bodies would make
kaoliang stalks grow thicker, crops
richer, making the estimate that as sure
as *kaoliang* grew, communism would certainly
come to the rising generations.

Have you forgotten that when we parted
we pledged we would meet where struggle
was toughest? Then as victory came
despite happiness or heartbreak
we would be true to the past and future?

Ah! Now of the pals of my youth,
dear ones of the *kaoliang* fields,
some are factory managers, some scholars,
then there are those who are editors,
others generals! Whether or not we meet
in this cane field is of small consequence,
I know well they can overcome any wild storm.

Comrades in battle, we who grew up together
in the north, you who are in the ranks of workers,
professors, party organizers or farmers,

I know should you return to *kaoliang* fields
where now life has changed, you would
recapture the spirit of fighting youth again.

Sugar-cane, oh! The south
a forest of it! Why so sweet
a smell for me, yet so austere?
Kaoliang fields, ah! Northern *kaoliang*
why so distant, yet so dear to me?

March - June 1962
Amoy - Peking

Translated by Rewi Alley

MALCHINHU

The Olunchuns

On the Train

Boarding the train at eleven last night, we all turned in as soon as we found our berths, knowing that a whole day and night's travelling lay ahead.

I woke this morning to find the train already in the Greater Khingan Mountains. This was my first journey through timberland. Forests have a mysterious fascination for me. In my study hang paintings of woodland scenery by Kuindzhi, while the works of Turgeniev and Paustovsky had given me some idea of the beauty of forests. But today was my first chance for first-hand appreciation of a far-stretching forest in all its glory.

September is the best time of the year in Peking, a season of high blue skies and golden leaves. But outside the windows here was a world of silver — we heard that yesterday the first snow had fallen! The nipping wind that found its way through the windows made the passengers from further south put on one fresh layer of clothes after another.

The train was rumbling now across a river that had not yet frozen hard but was frosted over with a layer of ice like a mirror, barely thick enough to bear the weight of a leaf. A dense veil of soft, filmy morning mist added to the majesty of the mountains and the mystery of the forest. This world — green the whole year round — set one's fancy working in terms of fairy tales.

A Soviet writer of the Chukchi minority has described a tribe of hunters who live on the snow-bound northeast tip of Siberia where not a tree can be found, and the raptures of one of their daughters when she saw her first tree at Khaborovsk; but the Olunchuns of our country, who subsist by hunting too among snow and ice, live from the day of their birth in this boundless ocean of trees.

The Olunchuns are one of the smallest peoples in the world, who right down to the time of liberation were nomadic huntsmen. Since liberation this small minority, numbering only two thousand, has become a member of the big Chinese family on an equal footing with all the fraternal nationalities — including six hundred million Hans — and is working selflessly to build socialism in our land.

I had travelled to the forest to visit the Olunchuns. In the days to come I would see something of their life, of which so far I knew nothing, although I was already captivated by the glorious landscape outside our carriage windows.

After breakfast the passengers stowed their baggage neatly away to start chatting and playing cards, or, if they liked quiet, to stare reflectively out of the windows. The train thundered on through the green barrier of the forest. . . .

Opposite me sat a young woman with a six or seven-year-old boy, a likable little fellow with brown hair and rosy cheeks. I guessed from his mother's accent that she came from Szechuan. She was fine-featured and delicate in appearance; an actress possibly, judging by her looks and manner. Perhaps she was paying a visit to relatives and it was her first trip here too. But what relatives could a southerner have up here? Maybe her father was a forestry expert or an engineer. . . . Speculating like this about strangers is a habit of mine, and I enjoy a sense of triumph if my guesses prove right.

Today, though, my initial theory was soon debunked. This was not her first visit to the region. Pointing to the hills outside she told her son which were deciduous pines, red pines, oaks, maples and white birches. She explained that the red pines and deciduous pines had needle-shaped leaves, while oaks, maples and birches were broad-leafed species. She went on to describe each tree's habitat, use and economic value.

The little fellow was bright, no doubt about it, for he sometimes anticipated her explanations, cutting in:

"I know, deciduous trees have hard wood and don't mind cold or damp. They make good telegraph poles, railway sleepers and bridges. . . ."

The small boy spoke not like a southerner but more like a Mongolian speaking Chinese. I wondered if she had a job up here and the boy had been born in the north. To find out, I got into conversation with them.

"Are you travelling far?"

"We're getting off at Ali River," was her courteous answer.

Ali River, the headquarters of the Olunchun Autonomous Banner, was my own destination.

"Do you work there?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Where have you just come from?"

"We've been to Szechuan to visit his grandmother."

I might have questioned her as to when she had come to the border region, what her job was, what family she had; but, satisfied by my initial success, I decided to test my powers of judgement and imagination further.

She was not an actress, I decided, though she looked rather like one. For one thing, her movements were too restrained, with none of the expressive gestures of theatre people; for another, I knew that as yet the Olunchun region had no professional theatrical company or relatively well-organized amateur group. I thought she might be a doctor; but when one of the passengers suddenly fell ill and the loud-speaker asked any doctor travelling on the train to go to that compartment to help, she looked worried and said: "Too bad, being taken ill suddenly here! I do hope there's a doctor on the train."

Finally I decided she must be a teacher.

Not many young mothers bring up their children as carefully and scientifically as she was doing. Her little boy had fixed hours for getting up and going to bed and set mealtimes too; he was lively and obedient, and could talk to grown-ups politely. Not in school yet, he already knew the phonetic alphabet, and he even asked me: "Uncle, what's seven times nine?"

The child's accent led me to suppose that the mother had been in these parts for at least seven or eight years, coming first as a girl fresh from school. She must have fallen in love here and married another teacher, no, a doctor in the local hospital who was probably a southerner too. Perhaps the next year the happy young couple had had this brown-haired baby. She was obviously a capable girl with a will of her own. She'd have encountered plenty of difficulties in setting up a school, for the Olunchuns had never sent their children to school. I could just see her crying in exasperation, bursting into the Party secretary's house without knocking to blurt out: "I'm not up to it!" But before he could speak she remembered her determination at graduation to work for the minority people at the border, the training the Party had given her and the thirst for knowledge in the eyes of the Olunchun children who had quite won her heart. So after an abrupt "No, I'll manage somehow!" she hurried out through the biting wind and snow, back to the cheerful fire in her small log cabin. . . .

"Is this your first visit here, comrade?"

Her question broke in on my thoughts. I made haste to reply:

"Yes, that's why I'm finding everything fresh and strange."

Our train was slowing down to stop at a station. Indicating the signboard on the platform, she said:

"This little station is Linting — the highest stop on the Greater Khingan Mountains! It's so cold here sometimes in winter that trains can't run. I came here one winter with the hunters."

"During the school holidays?" said I, eager to confirm my guess.

"Yes, the year we'd worked like demons to set up the school. When the children went home for the holidays I'd nothing to do, so I came to the hills with the hunters to learn to hunt. I'd never ridden a horse or fired a gun, and it was bitterly cold — more than fifty degrees below zero, imagine that! — so I made a proper fool of myself more than once."

"Do the women here hunt too?" I asked.

"A few of them. I was bursting to show what I could do, and as I'd no child then and was my own mistress I went up the hills with the hunters."

I began to envy her. What an enchanting life for those of us who are always on the look-out for fresh experiences! High mountains, dense forests, fierce winds, heavy snow, the whinnying of horses, the crack of rifles and the endless game: black bears, tigers, wild boars, wolves, foxes, deer and badgers. . . .

The train ran downhill for a considerable distance before reaching a narrow flat stretch between two sheer mountains whose snowy peaks could only be seen by craning your neck to look at the distant sky. My gaze returned from the clouds high above to the young teacher opposite, and I grasped the strength of character behind that pretty, delicate face.

Enough of guesses and speculations: her life surely held valuable lessons in it for me. But just as I was about to question her, the young mother called to her son, who had left the compartment:

"Utamukhan! Come back, Utamukhan!"

"Utamukhan" was a striking name and not Mongolian either.

"Is that an Olunchun name?" I asked.

She flushed a little as she answered:

"Yes, it is."

The boy came running back to say:

"Did you call me, mam? There are hazel bushes outside. I wanted to pick some nuts."

"Put on that coat granny made. We'll soon be there."

"Are we nearly at Ali River?" I inquired.

"It's the next stop, comrade. You'd better start getting ready."

That same moment the loud-speaker announced: "The next station is Ali River. . . ."

The passengers rose to lift down suitcases or pick up bundles. Old friends were inviting one another home, while those newly acquainted were taking their leave of each other. "Goodbye, uncle!" said little Utamukhan, offering me his small plump hand just like a grown-up. His mother added:

"If you've time, do come to see our school. My name is Li."

The train steamed slowly into Ali River. The station was newly built, the scaffolding still standing. Electricians were busily fixing up the lights.

Suddenly Utamukhan caught hold of my hand, mistaking me for his mother, and jumped up shouting:

"There's dad, mam! Over there!"

He was too excited to notice he'd got the wrong hand.

His mother flushed again as she bent to look through the window.

"Dad must have been afraid we'd be cold. He's brought our coats."

I looked out and saw beyond the platform fence a powerfully built young man in a coat lined with deer-skin and hide hunting boots. Two more deer-skin coats were flung over his arm and he was holding the reins of three horses, standing on tiptoe to look for his wife and son.

This young man was no doctor or southerner, that was clear! At the risk of seeming impertinent, I asked:

"Is that Utamukhan's father with the horses?"

She nodded, smiling.

"What organization does he work in?"

"He's not in any office. He's a hunter in the Trapping Brigade."

"Is he a Han?"

"No, an Olunchun."

The train stopped before I could ask any more questions. Once on the platform, I heard young Utamukhan call out to his father as he bounded towards him. By the time I left the ticket-barrier, the three of them were already in the saddle. The three horses left tracks like three girls' long plaits in the snow. Young Utamukhan in front was riding a grey horse. His father and mother, side by side after their long separation, were swaying easily in their saddles behind him. At moments their shoulders touched. They were talking over something that amused them, for the teacher's gay laugh kept ringing out, and from time to time the young hunter turned his ardent gaze on his lovely wife. They were savouring the sweetness of reunion. . . .

They must have begun to fall in love that winter when she went to the hills with the hunters. He's a real man, his heart as ardent as his eyes; otherwise how could he have won such a girl's love?

Speculating and dreaming again to myself, I walked off.

A Barbecue

The heavy snow at my arrival tricked me into thinking there would be no more brilliant autumn sunshine here. But I was mistaken. These last few days have been uninterruptedly fine. Despite a nip in the air in the mornings and evenings, midday is still pleasantly warm. The snow on the plains and the sunny sides of the hills has melted, making the brooks brim over so that you could fancy spring is just round the corner. The hunters have told me, however, that the next change in the weather will end the autumn and usher in grim winter.

I have been in luck. An Olunchun hunter called Kupochin invited me to his home, promising: "I'll treat you to some game not even you Mongolians have tasted." When a perfect day came for an outing, I set off to find him.

There is hardly a place in the whole Olunchun Banner on the Greater Khingan Mountains that wouldn't make an ideal site for a rest home. Streams, flowers and forests seem to have been laid out so skilfully by some giant hand. It often strikes me that these dwellers in the woodlands are Nature's favourite children, for it is given to them from birth to death to enjoy this incomparable beauty.

Old Kupochin's home stands in a grove of white birch on the bank of a stream which washes the foot of a hill. After following a long path through the forest, we saw his three-roomed bungalow in the distance. It was spick and span, the glass windows clean and sparkling, as if the owners had never lived any other way.

Olunchun, literally, means "men of the mountains." For generations these people lived in the dense mountain forests. Prior to liberation they had no houses, only a sort of wigwam made of thirty-odd poles lashed together at the top and covered with the bark of white birch or deer skins. The whole year round these crude huts let in rain or snow; added to which, the hunters slept on the ground, so that naturally their health suffered. Now none of them live in wigwams any more. The new log cabins daubed with clay built for them by the government after liberation have marked a real turning-point in their lives.

Dogs started barking as we approached Kupochin's house. They were pretty much like our Mongolian dogs, all but one wiry hound who was kept for hunting.

The dog's barking brought a girl running out from the house. She was wearing a red cardigan, green woollen skirt and high leather boots like a woman undergraduate in Mongolia. I knew her. This was Monakhet, Kupochin's much loved daughter, who had just graduated from the Huhehot Medical College – she can speak Chinese as well as Tahur and Mongolian fluently. Monakhet is the first doctor of the Olunchun Banner.

She welcomed us in and her father greeted us eagerly, then introduced his son, Yaletun, a fine young hunter who could shoot and ride by the time he was seven and went into the hills at nine with his father to hunt. A crack marksman, he never misses a single shot. When he was sixteen, he won the national championship in the All-China Sports Meet for a 100-metre shot at a moving target. Just turned eighteen, he looks like a grown man.

As Kupochin introduced his children, their good mother stood beaming with pride in the fine son and daughter she has raised. Since she can speak no language but Olunchun, she could only welcome her guests with a smile. Anyone could see at a glance that this household was a happy, harmonious one.

"I'll be frank with you, friends – I've made no preparations for your coming!"

I felt rather embarrassed. We should have sent them warning in advance.

"Don't take offence, friends," went on Kupochin cheerfully. "This is my way of showing you special honour!"

Before I could grasp his meaning, Batu who was with me explained:

"The hunters won't let honoured guests eat game killed overnight."

The old hunter went on:

"My girl will take you comrades to see our commune's deer farm and vegetable plots. We'll meet again at noon on the West Hill!"

Thereupon he turned to assign the others their tasks:

"Yaletun, go to the North Hill and get me a deer – a plump one!"

He said this as casually as a townsman might say, "Go to the end of the lane and buy two pounds of pork!" or a villager, "Go to the garden and pick some scallion." Yet a deer weighs from fifty to sixty pounds. A newcomer here, I had my breath taken away!

Yaletun took his gun and sheath-knife down from the wall, walked out, mounted his horse and was off.

Kupochin turned to his wife.

"Will you get some fruit while I spear some fish? Come back in time to light the bonfire."

These tasks distributed, he told his daughter to show us round, and strode down to the bank in front of the house with a three-pronged fish-spear and a bucket made of white birch bark. By the time we reached the deer farm with Monakhet, we could see him seated on a white birch boat, rowing effortlessly over the swi ling stream. The Olunchuns are good fishermen as well as hunters. Their chief food apart from game is fish, which they catch both with nets and spears. It is said that the more experienced among them can tell from the ripples in the water what fish is lurking below. The near-by rivers — the Ali, Kan and Chiwan — are stocked with fish of every kind, but in autumn the main catch is dog salmon.

As for wild fruit, the Khingan Mountains are a veritable vast market-garden for the Olunchuns. Here grow wild grapes, wild pears and plums, and the bitter-sweet berry called *du-ssu* from which we Inner Mongolians make a celebrated wine. The Olunchun women spend much of their time every autumn gathering these wild fruits.

Kupochin's wife, a white birch crate on her back, had taken a path up behind the house to pick fruit in the hills.

We visited the deer farm and vegetable plot of the commune.

As noon drew near we went to the place appointed by the old hunter — the West Hill — and found our hostess there with her fruit. A few days earlier, she said, there would have been more. As it was, in that short time she had filled her crate to the brim.

Monakhet took the fruit to the river to wash it, while we helped her mother light the fire. She told us this was where they used to live: Monakhet and Yaletun had been born on this hillside. The ground was fairly high here, commanding a view

of all the mountains near by. The verdant hillside was lovely as a young girl, with the silver stream as a girdle round her waist. In the golden autumn light, the mountains had a strength and majesty all their own.

A shout from the distant bank made our hostess shade her eyes to look that way.

"It's my old man. What can the matter be?"

Monakhet ran over to her father while we watched and waited rather uneasily. Before long the two of them started back towards us, walking as slowly as if each step cost an effort. Batu and I hurried to meet them. When we were close enough we saw they were burdened with a pole from which hung two fish weighing a good sixty pounds, while in addition each had a bucketful of smaller fish. It seemed incredible that in such a short time he had caught so many fish. We congratulated Kupochin as we took over his load.

"Isn't Yaletun back yet?" he asked.

"I just heard two rifle shots, but he hasn't shown up yet," replied Monakhet.

"Hope he's not going to lose face for us in front of guests!" said the old man, winking at us.

His tone implied plainly enough: My son's as good a man as his father.

We had finished cleaning the fish when a rider emerged from the forest on the East Hill. He was singing an Olunchun song and his resonant voice echoed through the valleys till it seemed as if the whole Greater Khingans were singing.

Yaletun was back.

He had made a fine bag too — one deer and three pheasants! Enough to last us for nearly a fortnight.

I looked at my watch — they had not been gone two and a half hours.

But the hunter looked none too pleased and his son, sensing this, explained:

"I didn't want to keep the guests waiting, so I didn't go high up the hills."

I stood up for Yaletun, saying:

"Our champion marksman has bagged so much game in two hours, we're in for a treat."

"Don't talk about champions, that makes it even worse," retorted his father. "The year he came back, a champion, from Peking, the first time he went into the hills he nearly let a bear get him."

"Dad! . . ." The youngster's face was burning.

"Why shouldn't I tell them? Hunters have got to remember their defeats as well as their triumphs." Turning back to us, he went on: "He came back a champion from Peking, covered with honour! The next day I took him up the hills to hunt. We kept fairly close, hunting round a small peak. I was looking another way when I heard him fire. I turned to see he'd met a black bear. Any hunter can tell you how savage the bear is — if you don't finish him off with one shot he'll charge like a crazy thing and you'd better look out! But your champion hadn't so much as grazed the bear's fur, and the beast was rushing at him with bared teeth. When I saw how things were, I brought the brute down with one shot. You should have seen our champion then, his face as white as the white birch! It's not everyone who can be a hunter. You may be a national champion in marksmanship, yet not make a good hunter. Before every shot a hunter should think: 'I've got to kill my quarry!' There's no room for uncertainty here, no perhaps or maybe! And that's not easy, comrades! But what was Yaletun thinking when he fired that shot? He was saying to himself: 'I'm national champion: for me to shoot a big black bear is simple.' That nearly did for him."

This was no subtle theory the hunter was expounding, yet he voiced a significant truth and one which set me thinking.

His wife put in:

"Do your talking later when we're eating. Time's getting on."

So we set to work to chop wood and cut meat. Only Monakhet withdrew to show her skill in preparing a real "city-style" fish soup.

That was some barbecue for you! We sat round the bonfire, each armed with a knife, and cut strips of venison which we roasted there. The Olunchuns roast their meat differently from us in Mongolia. We spit the flesh or chop it up to grill, but they slice it up and put the strips on wooden stakes beside the fire, turning them when one side is cooked. Venison shouldn't be too

thoroughly cooked but slightly underdone. That's not strange: townsfolk don't like roast mutton too well cooked either.

Soon the hillside was redolent of roast meat, stewed pheasant and boiled fish. Then our hostess conjured up two bottles of *du-ssu* wine and said:

"Comrades, I want your opinion of my home-brewed wine!"

That same moment Monakhet called: "Phew, it's hot!" as she brought over a small pan of fish soup. Having taken off the lid, she drew herself up to say proudly:

"You won't taste better soup than this even in the best restaurant in Huhehot!"

Observing the Olunchuns' custom of respect for elders, we made old Kupochin take the first mouthful of meat, the first spoonful of soup, the first fish, the first fruit and the first cup of wine. Then he put fat venison into all our bowls to wish us a happy future.

The open-air banquet began.

It was a glorious experience. The mountains supplied a fresh breeze, the sun bathed us in warmth and light, while each flower, grass and tree on the Greater Khingan Mountains made heart-stirring music for us.

The Night of the Snowstorm

Snowflakes came fluttering down from early morning till the blue northern night was ready to fall.

The moon rose late, like a fairy gliding on to the stage after waiting for the audience to quiet down. Travelling at night in the moonlight through the quiet, empty silver forest is like wandering through fairyland. Yang Pen and I were characters in a fairy tale.

Yang Pen is an Olunchun of sixty-seven with fewer white hairs than mine. His hunter's eyes can still distinguish game several *li* away. A veteran Communist, he is looked up to by all the other hunters. He can speak Chinese with a Harbin accent and sing northeastern songs. Someone told me half-jokingly that

he was "a translator," because he had translated a masterpiece from Chinese into Olunchun, and I regretted that I couldn't read it. Now he was delivering supplies to the Trapping Brigade, and since that was where I was bound we became good travelling companions.

Our cart was rolling through a white birch forest. It was the brief spell of quiet after snow. Huge snowflakes were hanging from the birch leaves like fluffy white chicks. Neither bird nor beast had yet had time to imprint its foot-marks on the virgin snow, which bore nothing but our wheel-tracks like two rows of stitches on a length of silk. Sunk in quiet enjoyment, neither of us felt any inclination to break the rare silence of the grim northern winter.

Old Yang let the reins trail loosely over the snow and the horse ambled on, snuffing as if in answer to a challenge, knowing that the snow would be followed by a hurricane.

I have been through plenty of hurricanes on the grasslands, but had yet to experience one in the forests. These great gales cause considerable damage, but the men who come through them know something of the joy of battle.

From deep in the distant forest came an uncanny sound, faint yet strangely shrill, as if a hidden ventriloquist were playing a trick on us. From time to time a cold wind brushed the snow, whirling it into a fine silver mist. One by one the snowflakes floated down from the leaves to eddy awhile in the faintly moving air before falling upon their companions near the tree.

The moon, covered by tenuous clouds, had lost some of its brightness. The night sky was a lurid yellow, and the immaculate snowdrifts seemed covered with dust.

All this foretold the imminence of the storm.

With a glance at the sky, Old Yang started whistling gaily, though his hands tightened involuntarily on the reins.

"Here, let's sit close together!" he said, moving nearer to the middle.

We were heading south with the wind, so however violent the storm it could not delay us. Old Yang and I sat shoulder to shoulder and threw a large wolfskin coat over our backs, then let down the ear-flaps of our fox-skin caps. The old man raised a hand to salute the sky and cried:

"Come on, storm! We're ready for you!"

Almost at once the storm hit us with full force, as if it had been waiting behind the quiet forest for the host's invitation before bursting through the door.

After that, we became to all intents blindfolded, unable to see anything around, our ears filled with the frenzied roaring of the wind. We had absolute faith that our good Olunchun horse, able to find its way under any conditions, would carry us safely to our destination. I sat with closed eyes in the cart, which was rocking gently to and fro like a cradle, and listened to Nature's powerful medley of music, wondering what a musician would have made of it.

Suddenly I heard the familiar strains of the *Internationale,* not in Mongolian or Chinese but in some language I could not understand.

In a flash, I felt the whole forest was singing in unison. I opened my eyes to discover it was Old Yang who was singing the grand old song softly to himself.

Why not choose some Olunchun folk song, some northeastern melody or some new tune? Why, travelling through this howling winter gale, should he suddenly sing the *Internationale*? Soft and low as he sang, there was fire and strength in his voice. It fitted in perfectly with this night of storm. He had obviously chosen it with good reason. You could hear he was singing from his heart.

I shot a glance at him. His expression was as calm and serene as ever, with the faintest trace of pride and self-confidence. His eyes were fixed on the road ahead, as if it held stirring memories of the past.

When he had finished, I asked:

"Were you singing the *Internationale* in Olunchun?"

"That's right!"

He clenched his fist and started again more loudly in Chinese.

> We'll change forth with the old conditions,
> And spurn the dust to win the prize!

Glorious *Internationale*! By how many different peoples and in how many different languages has this battle-song of the world's toilers been sung! By great peoples numbering tens and

even hundreds of millions, as well as by small peoples of a few hundred or few tens of thousands; but when did the Olunchuns, who number no more than two thousand in all the world, first sing this great song in their own native tongue?

For me, this was no mere academic question but something infinitely more significant. While I was turning the matter over in my mind, Old Yang said half to himself:

"One winter's evening twenty years ago, two of us travelled this road in a gale just like today's. . . ."

"Is the man who was with you still alive and well?"

"Yes, he's a Han comrade. That night he was sitting by me on the cart, just as you are, coming to our Olunchun region. The icy wind made it hard to breathe, but he kept singing this song which gives a man strength and sets a fire burning in his heart. I asked, 'What's that you're singing, mate?' He said, 'It's called the *Internationale*.' 'A fine song,' I said. 'Will you teach it to me?' He agreed at once. After I'd learned a few lines in Chinese, I knew the sort of song it was. I stopped singing and said: 'Every Olunchun should be taught this song. Will you help me translate it into Olunchun, mate?' He replied he'd be glad to, but he didn't know our language. I told him to explain the meaning and I'd try to translate it. So the next morning, by the time we got to the Banner, our Olunchun *Internationale* was born. Like a magic bird, it winged its way to every wretched Olunchun home, for all our people loved it. . . ."

The wind was still howling and roaring, but the mighty forest withstood the whole force of its fury. Old Yang and I, shoulder to shoulder, started singing together the song which he had likened to a "magic bird."

Translated by Gladys Yang

Girl in Red Skirt by Lin Feng-mien▶

See the article on the artist on p. 101.

Motherland, Native Soil

Motherland, native soil that bred me, your son,
All my love, all my soul, are closely knit to your heart.
Party, our lighthouse, pilot and guide, speed on!
Wherever you lead us to fight, there is victory won.
This splendid age is our people's pride and glory,
And proud are we, the singers of our time;
Torn from this life-giving soil, this age, this lighthouse,
We would find Paradise itself a Hell.
Oh, land of the glorious history, your soil is a living encyclopaedia,
Each page more rewarding than reading ten thousand tomes;
Each speck of China's sand is so dear to me,
The Gobi Desert smells as sweet as flowers;
China's rivers are the waters of life to me,
Drunk though I am on heavenly springs and the holy waters of Mecca;
Wherever I go is my well-loved home,
Be it Khotan, Anshan or the Taihang Mountains;

Teipdjan Aliev, a young Uighur poet, is the author of *Song of Peace* and other anthologies of poems. A great patriot, he sings fervently of his motherland, the revolution, socialist construction and friendship among China's fraternal nationalities.

Silk-clad in a strange land I should find no peace,
But ragged in China would know ecstasy.
I hate what China hates, love what she loves,
I make my country's trials and griefs my own;
To her foes I would be a dagger that pierces the heart,
To her friends a bridge that links our brotherhood;
Nor shall I turn a blind eye to China's betrayers,
But challenge these liars to their face and demand an answer;
Descended from a hero who battled with demons,
I am not to be moved from my post by baleful winds.*
Today our motherland smiles; yet fairer tomorrow will dawn;
Are the eyes she has given me blind to her future glory?
Like a lover I clasp tomorrow to my heart,
For with my flesh I have shielded her from cold.
When my mother calls me: "Come, my well-loved son!"
My heart leaps up in joy: no kiss could be sweeter.
Will she but accept the poor gift of my blood and sweat,
I shall know happiness beyond compare;
Let me never fall short of this great moment in history,
Far better perish than live on in shame.
Set your heavy load on me, mother! Your swift steed is ready;
For you I will gallop on, though hills loom high.
Dear land, I owe life to you, I am nothing without you;
Your life, your substance are mine, great motherland!

Translated by Gladys Yang

* According to a Uighur legend, a demon had a cave full of treasures, the home of storm-winds; but a hero defeated the demon, bringing happiness to the people.

Notes on Literature and Art

HO CHI-FANG

On "The Dream of the Red Chamber"

The famous classical novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber* appeared in the middle of the eighteenth century, during the last period of prosperity of the last feudal dynasty in China. After a rule of over one century, the imperial Manchu House of Ching had crushed not only the resistance of the Hans but that of the minority peoples in the north, northwest, west and southwest, and apparently held firm and powerful sway. This does not mean, however, that there existed no serious social conflicts, notably national and class conflicts, within the country. In a way reminiscent of the great noble family depicted in the novel, the Ching dynasty appeared most magnificent when it was actually in swift decline. By the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, peasant revolts kept flaring up. By 1840, less than one century after the appearance of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, the

Ho Chi-fang, a distinguished poet and literary critic, is the head of the Institute of Literary Research of the Academy of Sciences. His poems include the collections *Prophecy* and *Song of Night and Day*. He is also the author of *On Realism, The West Garden, No Progress Without Criticism* and *On "The Dream of the Red Chamber."* The article printed here is an abridgement of a monograph of more than eighty thousand words included in the last mentioned volume.

outbreak of the Opium War* marked the beginning of the collapse of Chinese feudalism which had persisted for more than two thousand years. This superb novel paints a most illuminating picture of that declining society, as if passing a final verdict on the old order before the advent of a new age. It seems to tell the reader: Away with these antiquated traditions and irrational customs! In this dark night when all is sunk in slumber, though I cannot yet tell what new dawn will break nor how man will achieve a free and happy life, here I condemn the iniquitous powers of darkness and affirm my ideals.

The central theme of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* and the main thread running through the whole book are the tragic love of Chia Pao-yu and his cousin Lin Tai-yu. Though Tsao Hsueh-chin did not finish writing their story, in Chapter 5 he intimated that it would end sadly. For later Chia Pao-yu was forced to marry another cousin, Hsueh Pao-chai, yet he could not forget Tai-yu or cease longing for her.

In feudal China a man and woman could not marry without the consent of their parents and the mediation of a go-between. Through many touching episodes dealing with the unhappiness of forced marriages, the novel makes a powerful exposure of the irrational feudal marriage system and shows that women were its main victims. It permitted open polygamy for men and immorality both open and secret, yet would not sanction the pure, idealistic love which blossomed like a flower in this corrupt family.

Tsao Hsueh-chin knew quite well that he was breaking fresh ground in his depiction of love. Just before embarking on this story he condemned the contradictory, improbable pattern of most earlier romances which gave only a sketchy love story, usually describing illicit love and elopements, with no detailed portrayal

* Between 1840 and 1842, in retaliation to the Chinese people's struggle against the opium traffic, the British invaded China under the pretext of protecting their trade. The Chinese army, under the leadership of Lin Tse-hsu, put up resistance; but the Ching government capitulated to the British and signed various unequal treaties. Step by step after this disgraceful surrender, feudal China became a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country.

of true love between a man and woman. This was the task he set himself. The stereotyped formalism of the earlier, hackneyed romances is flat and colourless compared with his brilliant novel, which in richness and profundity of content far surpasses all popular love stories that preceded it.

One most significant feature of the love of Pao-yu and Tai-yu is that it is based on mutual understanding and unity of outlook. Pao-yu admires the glowing health and beauty of Pao-chai, yet he chooses Tai-yu. This is not simply because their close friendship has led to love but because Pao-chai believes in all the feudal conventions and uses the orthodox ideas to persuade him, while Tai-yu never talks such "nonsense" or urges him to take the way to "success and fame" mapped out by the feudal ruling class. The principle that love must be based on mutual understanding and unity of outlook is applicable today and in time to come. Tsao Hsueh-chin lived before the modern era, yet he advocates ideals for love and marriage which could not be realized in his day. This is true of all great works of literature: the ideals to which they subscribe have validity not only for their period but for the future.

When we say that the love between Pao-yu and Tai-yu embodies a principle valid today, we do not mean that it was like the love of modern times. A great writer may advocate an ideal valid for the future, but he cannot describe life which does not yet exist. In eighteenth-century China there was no such love as that we see today. So their love has another striking characteristic, namely its strong feudal character, which is shown first and foremost in their peculiarly roundabout and painful way of expressing their feelings. For a long while Pao-yu and Tai-yu have frequent quarrels, sometimes serious ones. Modern readers may wonder at these clashes between two lovers and at their unhappiness even before tragedy overtakes them. But in feudal China, especially in a class and family like theirs, love could not find open and direct expression. This is made clear in Chapter 29 where the author says that Pao-yu "had already lost his heart to Tai-yu but, because he could not say so, sometimes he seemed pleased and at other times angry, trying by every means to sound her out." Tai-yu too "often resorted to pretence to try him out

. . . concealing her true feelings and acting a part." This made quarrels practically inevitable. The love between them was like a young sapling rooted under a rock but full of vitality. In spite of repression it still thrust stubbornly upwards, yet it could not avoid being twisted and somewhat distorted. Thus their love has more in it of pain than sweetness, or rather the two are so closely intermingled that it is hard to distinguish one from the other. *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is deeply moving because of its subtle portrayal of such a love story.

The love between Pao-yu and Tai-yu is bound to come to a tragic end not only because they are rebels in their attitude to love, but because they are rebels in their attitude to society. Pao-yu is opposed to all manner of feudal institutions. He is against the examination system, the *paku* examination essay and officialdom. He defies the strict class distinctions of feudal society and the concept that men are superior to women. He detests the Confucian codes of morality and family conventions. He destroys, except for the Four Books, many of those works highly esteemed by the feudal ruling class. This rebellion against so many shibboleths cannot go unpunished, yet Tai-yu takes his side, supports and loves him, not submitting tamely herself; so there can be no happy outcome for her. The tragedy of Pao-yu and Tai-yu is a two-fold tragedy of love forbidden by the feudal moral code and of rebels condemned by the feudal ruling class. The combination of these two factors gives the novel its deep significance. The irrational nature of the feudal system and feudal family and the corruption of the ruling class were bound to rouse the people to rebel, and some rebels were certain to arise from the ruling class itself. Chinese history and literature contain many instances of this, and Pao-yu personifies a whole host of rebellious views and acts.

Like many famous characters in Chinese and world literature, Chia Pao-yu has become a type. To many people he stands for the young men who like the company of girls and are popular with them. And this view, though over-simplified and one-sided, is not without foundation; for it corresponds to one most striking feature of this type which is described again and again in the novel. Before Pao-yu even appears, someone quotes a remark he made when a boy of seven or eight to this effect: "Girls are

made of water, men of mud." Later on he voices similar views: "All the finest essences of mountains and rivers, the sun and the moon, are concentrated in girls; men are nothing but the dregs." He is devoted to girls, not living ones only. When old Granny Liu comes from the country to visit her relative, she spins him a tale of a beautiful girl who has died and Pao-yu immediately wants to send men to look for her non-existent temple. The novel devotes considerable space to this important aspect of Pao-yu, this essential feature of his character. This original trait is what distinguishes him so strikingly from other rebels in history and literature. Of course, such an idiosyncrasy is entirely in keeping with Pao-yu's whole rebellious nature; from the viewpoint of feudal morality and the ruling class, his championship of girls is in itself enough to give rise to slander and attacks. As for Pao-yu, since he has turned his back on the road specified by his class, he can find nothing to which to dedicate his youth and life; hence his sole spiritual consolation is his fondness for innocent and lovely girls, especially his unchanging love for Tai-yu.

Young people have a natural affinity to each other. And Pao-yu happens to live in close contact with many beautiful and intelligent girls. He likes very few men of his own class, very few married women; but the girls are relatively unspoiled and he is particularly drawn to the oppressed maid-servants treated no better than slaves. In Chapter 71 someone remonstrates with him, "All you do is play about with girls . . . not worrying your head in the least about the future." He retorts with a laugh, "Each day I can spend with them is to the good. Then I'll die and be done with it—who cares about the future?" This remark made in fun has its poignancy too, revealing why he wants to spend all his time with girls: not only because of natural affinity but because of his disillusionment with his own family and class. His consideration and kindness towards servant girls stem from sympathy as well as enjoyment of their company, but it is sympathy that predominates. He grieves and sheds tears over Ping-erh, the orphan with no brothers or sisters, who has to serve his cousin Chia Lien and his wife Wang Hsi-feng, and whose fate is even sadder than that of Tai-yu. Elsewhere he sympathizes with Hsiang-ling, another maid with no family who has been sold

to his cruel cousin Hsueh Pan. For a man of his age, society and situation, Pao-yu strikes us as strangely naive and idealistic. We can grasp the deep significance of such a character only if we link up his sympathy for girls with his entire rebellious nature, considering it as a bold form of opposition to feudal morality and the concept of masculine superiority.

Again we should not over-simplify Tai-yu or regard her merely as a rebel. Let us recall the general consensus of opinion about this well-known heroine. The name Lin Tai-yu has become synonymous with delicate, over-sensitive girls who are easily depressed and prone to shed tears. This rather superficial and one-sided view is also not without foundation; for it does represent the most striking feature of this typical character which is brought out again and again in the novel. Tai-yu is described as follows: "She would sit quietly by herself, frowning or sighing, and often for no reason at all would melt into floods of tears." After many tests have convinced her that Pao-yu loves her, she regrets that her parents have died too soon, leaving no one to propose the match for her, and that she is so ill she may not live long. She seems indeed to have a premonition of her fate. Later her illness grows worse, and Pao-yu urges her to take care of herself and not grieve so much. But wiping her tears she says, "These days though my heart keeps aching, my tears seem to flow less readily than before. Such heartache, yet fewer tears!" Pao-yu replies, "That's because you had got into the habit of crying. But what strange fancies you have! How could you reach the end of your tears?" Another time her maid Tzu-chuan says to her, "All these young nobles like to have several wives. They care for one today, another tomorrow. Even one lovely as a goddess would be cold-shouldered after three nights at most." Having summed up the fate of most upper-class girls in this way, she urges Tai-yu to make up her mind to love Pao-yu. "Don't you know the proverb: Easy to get ten thousand taels of gold, but hard to find one who understands your heart?" However, not even to such a confidante can Tai-yu lay bare her true feelings and she weeps quietly all night. Such was the unhappy lot of girls of a good feudal family. Powerless to express her love or control her own fate, Tai-yu has recourse only to sorrow and

tears. But human nature is complex. The author describes other sides of her character: her remarkable intelligence, reserve and pride, her tendency to speak impulsively without considering the consequences, and her sharp tongue. Again, she has strong affections and is not always hard to please and temperamental, but may show great tenderness to those she loves. Still, her most striking feature is melancholy. In this sense she typifies the unhappy girls of Chinese feudal society. Life has dealt so harshly with her. An orphan forced to live with relatives, because she scorns to curry favour she is left alone; she falls hopelessly in love with a man who understands her, but suffers agony from the fetters of feudalism, and has not the courage to break them; while added to all this her illness grows steadily worse. Since Tai-yu is a girl, her rebellion takes a very different form from that of Pao-yu, venting itself largely through suffering. Although nearly crushed by misfortune, she does not submit but attempts to change her fate. Unable to break all the mental fetters imposed by feudalism, she nevertheless struggles on, revealing a spirit still untamed and proud.

In this subtle yet powerful manner, through the tragedy of two young lovers, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* advocates freedom of choice in marriage and love based on mutual understanding and a similar outlook. It has, moreover, created two immortal types in Chia Pao-yu and Lin Tai-yu.

The tragedy of these young people is the main theme of this novel, but the broad panorama of life presented here extends far beyond their personal misfortunes. *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is one of the masterpieces of world literature, a work profoundly rich in content which does not merely choose one story from life and limit itself to the characters in that story; for its wealth of characters and complex events makes us feel that life itself is unfolding before our eyes that what is happening is real. The novel deals with the two large feudal families of Lord Ning and Lord Jung, especially the latter. This is the environment in which the tragedy of Pao-yu and Tai-yu is enacted; but these two households are not merely sketched in as a background. They emerge as real as actual life with its interplay of different characters and incidents each having its separate significance. They are more than a simple background.

Four hundred and forty-eight characters have been counted in this novel, including, naturally, some who are unimportant. There are at least several dozen characters, however, which make a vivid, unforgettable impression.

Tsao Hsueh-chin described many lovely or talented girls and obviously had great sympathy for the maids who were treated like slaves. One of his most outstanding portraits is that of Ching-wen.

Ching-wen is a slave girl bought by the steward Lai Ta. Since Pao-yu's grandmother approves of her intelligence and pretty looks, Lai's mother presents her as a small gift to the Lady Dowager. The novel devotes little space to Ching-wen, a girl who does not know who her parents were, but each appearance she makes is most effective. Open and frank, with none of Tai-yu's melancholy or Hsi-jen's subservience, this ingenuous girl treats their young master as her equal, looking on Pao-yu as a dear brother or friend. She fearlessly shows no submission to his mother or the others who control her fate. It is no exaggeration to say that she is the only untamed girl in the house, the one retaining most of the rugged independence of the common people. And that is why she suffers the worst fate. Her death is one of the saddest episodes in the novel, for in addition to bringing out the girl's true feelings and love it conveys such heart-rending grief and indignation. The death of this blameless girl, falsely accused, is a strong protest against injustice. Hsi-jen seduces Pao-yu, but she is a trusted favourite of his mother whereas Ching-wen, because of her insubordination, is accused of being a temptress and hounded to death. This contrast lights up the hypocrisy, senselessness and cruelty of the feudal moral system and its adherents. Hence Ching-wen wins our special sympathy and love.

All the novel's descriptions of the revolts of these girls, the lowest of the low, are remarkably moving. They pierce the gloom of the great household like rays of sunlight. All manner of misfortunes await these maids. They die wretchedly like Ching-wen or Chin-chuan, become concubines like Ping-erh or Hsiang-ling, are condemned to live single all their life like Yuan-yang after refusing the advances of her old master, are married off at

random or become nuns. They have no say in their marriage, no personal freedom.

But *The Dream of the Red Chamber* deals not only with the misfortunes of girls of low status who are treated as playthings and slaves by the ruling class, to be destroyed at will. Even the daughters of noble families are described as "having fortune but no luck." This applies not only to Lin Tai-yu: all Pao-yu's four sisters, too, are tragic figures.

This novel presents many vivid, unforgettable girls. Some of them are sisters or live under similar conditions, yet everyone is different, distinct. In this household of young girls, of course, apart from sorrow and suffering we find youth, laughter and abundant life; and these help to relieve the oppressive atmosphere of the whole tragedy. Yet all these girls come to a sad end, a true reflection of the fate of women in feudal China.

Many girls in the book are presented as far more intelligent and talented than men like Pao-yu's uncle Chia Sheh, his father Chia Cheng and his cousins Chia Chen and Chia Lien, bearing out the hero's contention that women are made of a finer substance than men. This bold and original view flatly contradicted the traditional feudal concept of male supremacy and revealed the fact that the unequal status of men and women had stifled many talents and caused endless tragedies. This was bound to arouse readers' sympathy and awaken them to the realization that a rational society should be differently ordered. The feudal marriage system was one specific cause of unhappiness for women. *The Dream of the Red Chamber* makes this clear through the story of Tai-yu and many other girls. Concubinage and the enslavement of maid-servants were other causes of unhappiness for women. This novel very movingly depicts the misery inflicted by these barbarous institutions.

The exposure of the inequality between men and women in feudal society, and still more the exposure of those criminal systems which directly oppressed women, are one of the important features of this novel, revealing its profound humanistic spirit.

Two other important women characters in the book are Hsueh Pao-chai and Wang Hsi-feng, both of whom also come to a sad end. For though Pao-yu marries Pao-chai he does not love her,

while his sister-in-law Hsi-feng is brought very low when her family breaks up. However, these characters and their activities clearly have a different significance and are not merely presented as examples of unfortunate women.

Pao-chai is a girl who firmly upholds the orthodox feudal ideas. To Pao-yu's disgust, she advises him time and again to take the path laid down by the feudal rulers. He considers her a vulgar career-seeker. To Shih Hsiang-yun and Lin Tai-yu she also preaches such feudal ideas as "Lack of talent in a woman is in itself a virtue." Naturally these ideas do not originate with her but are advocated by those "respectable books" which she thinks "most beneficial." These are feudalism's moral code for enslaving women. The author of this novel clearly sympathizes with and approves quite opposite views.

The novel also brings out clearly the way Pao-chai tries to ingratiate herself with others. As soon as she comes to the Chia Mansion she wins the hearts of the servants, while the Lady Dowager likes her "steady, quiet ways." When they are going to celebrate her fifteenth birthday, the old lady asks her what opera and food she would like. Since Pao-chai knows old people's taste for cheerful operas and sweet things, she answers accordingly. And she flatters the old lady, saying, "In all the years I've been here, I've noticed that Sister Feng, for all she's so clever, isn't as clever as the Lady Dowager." So the latter thinks the world of her and says: "Not one of our four girls is up to Pao-chai." After Chin-chuan is slapped, humiliated and driven away by Pao-yu's mother, she throws herself into a well and Lady Wang feels uneasy until Pao-chai tells her, "She can't have killed herself. If she did, it only shows how stupid she was, not worth your pity. Just give her family a few taels of silver." This episode, besides revealing how Pao-chai tried to please Pao-yu's mother, also discloses the heartlessness of this ardent supporter of feudalism. It is no accident that although Tai-yu is more closely related to the Chia family than Pao-chai, she is never described as attempting to curry favour with the Lady Dowager or any others. We know that Tsao Hsueh-chin was proud and reserved: hence his praise and sympathy for such characters. His manner of describing them shows his approval of Tai-yu and his condemnation of Pao-chai.

Still, Pao-chai is a young girl who loves Pao-yu. But according to the feudal conventions to which she subscribes she cannot choose her own husband nor can she express her feelings in the painful, devious way employed by Tai-yu. So while interested in Pao-yu, she maintains a certain reserve — "correct" behaviour on the part of a girl in feudal society. She is described as "steady . . . rather quiet and unassuming, easy-going and conventional." These are her most outstanding characteristics and they accord with the feudal ideal of feminine behaviour. It is clear, however, that the author does not approve of such a character. At the feast in honour of Pao-yu's birthday one evening, she draws lots in a drinking game and gets an ivory tablet painted with a peony and inscribed with the line, "Without passion yet having charm." The peony was considered the flower of wealth and prosperity, the queen of flowers, but with something vulgar about it. In other words, by feudal standards she was the queen of flowers, but the author pointed out her lack of true feeling due to her belief in feudal morality. The author admires those with strong emotions like Pao-yu and Tai-yu, but not the "heartless" characters in whom the fire of youth is extinguished.

Wang Hsi-feng, more commonly known as Sister Feng, is another vividly depicted character. Her appearance always brings liveliness, bustle and laughter. The Lady Dowager's favourite granddaughter-in-law, while no more than twenty she is given the general management of the whole household. She is first introduced through the eyes of others, who say: "She is so good-looking, so clever in conversation and so deep, few men are a match for her." Or "Though young in years, she has a better head for business than anyone else. And she's unsurpassed in beauty too. Of course she knows a thousand dodges. And if it comes to an argument, ten eloquent men can't out-talk her." All she says in the book bears the hallmark of a strong personality. Her remarks on different occasions reveal great subtlety and eloquence and are invariably suited to the occasion, whether she uses honeyed words, taunts or jokes. Even if no name were mentioned, we should know who was speaking. However, she is so different from all the other women in the novel that very soon we can see she is a beautiful but venomous serpent. Pao-yu's cousin Chia Jui is a

profligate, yet the traps she sets to kill him are utterly vile. When the nuns of Water Moon Convent ask her to use the family's official connections to dissolve an engagement, in return for a bribe of 3,000 taels of silver she brings death to a young couple. Moreover we read, "Thereafter Sister Feng waxed even bolder whenever similar occasions arose, acting as if she were a law to herself." Here the author's condemnation is quite clear. He makes it plain that she knew quite well how criminal these bold deeds were. For she says to a nun, "You have always understood me. I have never believed in Hell or retribution." She dares challenge any force which might try to stop her. So she leads a double life after this: on the one hand vivacious, amusing and eager to please, like a clever, harmless pet; on the other hand displaying that greed and cruelty that seem to have become second nature with her. She lends money at exorbitant rates of interest behind her husband's back, even taking the household wages for this purpose. When later the family cannot meet its expenses and her husband wants to sell the Lady Dowager's gold and silver plate, she agrees on condition that he pay her one or two hundred taels of silver. For intrigue and greed dominate their married life. After she discovers that her husband has married Second Sister Yu, she uses such tricks that the unfortunate second wife is finally driven to suicide. Then she tries to have the second wife's former betrothed murdered. This latter scheme is foiled, yet it shows the utter ruthlessness of this beautiful woman who thinks nothing of killing someone who has done her no wrong. In the later part of the novel she is described again by her husband's servant Hsin-erh as follows: "A wicked heart, a sharp, ready tongue. . . . Sweet words but a bitter nature, the double-faced creature! She smiles while she plots to do you in. All kindness to your face — then a stab in the back!"

Hsi-feng outdoes most of the men in the novel not in purity and goodness, but in cunning and cruelty. An exploiting class is by nature selfish and heartless, yet to consolidate its rule it must have certain moral ideas which seem rational at the time or on the surface. Since the feudal ruling class held power for so long in China, the moral system it evolved was remarkably systematic and deep-rooted and naturally enlisted many firm supporters. Pao-yu's parents and Pao-chai were of this category. There were

many others, however, who remained dissatisfied with the advantages secured for them by the feudal moral system, and these people revealed their class instincts more blatantly. In men like Chia Sheh, Chia Chen, Chia Lien and Hsueh Pan this generally took the form of lechery, while others like Sister Feng sought money and power. Basically alike, they differed in these respects.

Through these characters, the novel tears the mask from the vicious, ugly face of the feudal ruling class.

We have examined certain features and the main significance of some of the more important characters in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. The reader will be disappointed, however, if he expects to see the names of all the characters of interest to him or a discussion of all the problems in this novel. *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is like a forest or ocean, made up of countless different trees or waves, but we cannot hope to deal with each in turn.

In Chapter 17, when Pao-yu meets his father and some friends strolling through the newly built Grand View Garden, they start disputing about a place to be called Rice Fragrance Village. Chia Cheng thinks this spot has a rustic atmosphere, but Pao-yu argues in favour of another part.

"A country villa here would look obviously artificial and out of place. There are no villages in the distance, no fields near by, no mountain ranges behind, no source for the stream at hand, no pagoda half hiding a monastery, no bridge leading to a market. This isolated spot cannot be a grand view. The other place is better, being more natural. Bamboos could be planted there and a stream made without looking artificial. It would form what the ancients called 'a natural picture.' The trouble comes when you try to create something on an unsuitable site and insist on making hills where no hills are needed. However skilfully you go about it, the result will jar. . . ."

Before he finishes talking, his father angrily tries to dismiss him. Of course, in this case Pao-yu is right. It would look incongruous to have a spurious miniature village in an urban garden. What is worth noting here is the author's introduction of an important theory of art: Although literature and art are created by men, they should be as natural as life or nature itself.

The Dream of the Red Chamber bears out this theory of art magnificently. It is a Grand View Garden built by man, but all around, far and near, lie villages and fields, hills and streams; it does not exist in a vacuum. Its interior is superbly and accurately constructed, yet all its pavilions, towers and pools, as well as its flowers and herbs, seem the work of nature.

This is the chief characteristic of the artistry of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* and its most outstanding literary merit. This is a quality of all great works of art: Rich and complex as life itself, they are just as natural.

It is easy to handle a single theme and two or three chief characters. But to paint life in all its brilliant complexity, many different episodes and characters are needed, as well as a suitable structure and technique. This novel deals largely with one family and it would not do to follow up several distinct and different threads as in writing about several families; on the other hand it is not a single story involving merely two or three characters, for many episodes are described in great detail. So a different structure and style, more complicated in a sense, are needed. Briefly, we can perhaps divide the first eighty chapters into four sections. The first eighteen chapters introduce the houses of Lord Jung and Lord Ning and the Chia family garden, as well as such characters as Pao-yu, Tai-yu, Pao-chai, Sister Feng and Chin Ko-ching. Chapters 19 to 41 deal mainly with the attempts of Pao-yu and Tai-yu to sound out each other's feelings, the conflict between Pao-yu and feudal orthodoxy, and introduce other characters like Hsi-jen, Shih Hsiang-yun, Miao-yu and old Granny Liu. In Chapters 42 to 70, Pao-yu and Tai-yu have begun to understand each other and the conflict between Tai-yu and Pao-chai has disappeared; so the author starts to describe other aspects of life and new or as yet undeveloped characters like Yuan-yang, Hsiang-ling, Pao-chin, Ching-wen, Tan-chun, Hsing Hsiu-yen, Second Sister Yu and other young maids. The last ten chapters embark on the causes of the family's decline, notably its bankruptcy, the official investigation and the death of Ching-wen. There are different points of emphasis in all four sections, which are closely linked with the main plot and chief characters. Furthermore, each section includes many side-issues and minor characters all ingeniously interwoven. In this way, although the plot and characters are arranged systematically and

develop step by step, we are not conscious of anything contrived but seem to see the stream of life flowing majestically onwards.

To depict life in all its complexity calls for a suitable framework. However, the common prerequisite whether for writing a long novel or short story is that life must be presented so vividly that the reader's interest is held. This poses problems for a work on a grand scale which must describe many common occurrences as well as dramatic incidents and big scenes. Of course, talent is needed to make ordinary everyday incidents interesting, but even more genius is needed to paint big canvasses successfully. *The Dream of the Red Chamber* excels in both. The novel is full of meticulous, vivid descriptions of daily life which attract and hold our interest, not merely thanks to their skill and realism but also because these descriptions carry forward the story and round out the characters. Absorbed by the plot and the characters, we naturally take an interest in all that concerns them. Descriptions of details of daily life are the basis of a novel and it takes talent to present them realistically and graphically; but this does not mean that every small fragment of life can be used in literature and art. A thoughtful novelist does not supply details for their own sake. If this is done, the details make up an insipid, finicky drawing incapable of giving aesthetic pleasure, a mere catalogue of phenomena lacking significance. By itself, then, the ability to describe details cannot make a good novelist.

Real life consists not only of daily trifles, but also of important events and upheavals which result from developments in daily life and give concentrated expression to the meaning and conflicts of life. If in real life manifestations like this are rare, in literature and art they are more common and indispensable. Long works, especially, will prove dull if they contain no momentous events or great upheavals. In *The Dream of the Red Chamber* the major events and catastrophes are brilliantly depicted in a manner worthy of Tolstoy. Only a novelist of the first order dare present the scene in which Pao-yu and his father visit the Grand View Garden, his sister Yuan-chun's returning home, the Taoist sacrifice at Ching-hsu Abbey, and many great feasts. Yet Tsao Hsueh-chin in this single novel handles all these great scenes effortlessly, vividly and

movingly. Moreover in these descriptions the main story is being unfolded and the characters further developed, all with an overflowing vitality which reveals the secrets of life. The novel abounds in crises and upheavals. It never descends to long-winded narratives. Often a meticulous description is followed or interrupted by some sudden upheaval or change.

The greatest writers in China and other lands have developed the art of the novel to amazing heights, enabling it to embrace life in all its complexity. The trivia of life as well as its supreme moments find graphic, realistic expression in the novel, which creates typical circumstances on a splendid scale and a vast variety of typical characters. These basic features are shared by all great novels. However, this does not mean that *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is not distinctively Chinese. Its structure, language and style all owe much to the Chinese novels that preceded it. We have already noted the complex plot. Often a single chapter does not deal with one simple episode but consists of several interwoven strands. Undoubtedly this is due in part to the theme, but at the same time it is a characteristic of earlier prose romances. The language of the book shows even more clearly its debt to the earlier tales in the vernacular, although Tsao Hsueh-chin developed his language even further, making it lively and rich and using the Peking dialect for the most part. Stylistically, the book has other special features. For instance, it presents the Chia House as follows. First a general view is given; then additional touches are presented when Tai-yu, Pao-chai and old Granny Liu come to the house. These successive layers of colouring, like the technique known as *tsun jan** in Chinese painting, give readers a vivid impression of the place. This is a method often used by the author, not only to describe the Chia House but the love between Pao-yu and Tai-yu, the start of the decline in the family fortunes or the personalities of the major characters. He invariably follows up a brief introduction with additional descriptive touches thrown in

* This refers to two different techniques in traditional Chinese painting. *Tsun* are the "wrinkles" drawn on rocks in landscape paintings and *jan* the finishing touches of colour or ink. The two together refer to the method of first outlining the form and then adding colour.

here and there. This is one example of his distinctive style. Since Tsao Hsueh-chin was not only a novelist and poet but a good painter too, he may have learned this method from the *tsun jan* technique of Chinese painting. Other writers employ similar devices, but not to the extent seen in this novel. Thus *The Dream of the Red Chamber* has something of the quality of a painting in oils. When we consider a novel's plot, language and stylistic techniques in isolation, they may not strike us as significant; but it is usually these special features inherited from the past and further developed—and not any basic difference in the theory of art—that give a work its strong national character.

Another outstanding achievement of this novel is its creation of vital characters, many of whom are household words and types never to be forgotten. A writer who sets himself the task of reflecting a wide range of human experience from different aspects is bound to introduce many characters. The main problem in writing a novel of this magnitude is probably not so much how to marshal the complex and varied phenomena of life in a natural way, how to describe them truthfully and vividly or present great events and upheavals, but how to depict so many characters successfully.

To be vivid and lifelike, a character must be drawn in all its complexity but with its salient features portrayed in a forceful and concentrated manner. This is Tsao Hsueh-chin's method of characterization. As we have seen, Pao-yu, Tai-yu, Pao-chai and Sister Feng are highly complex and varied, yet each has his or her outstanding features and these special features have a profound social significance. The complexity and variety of a character are supplemented and fully brought out through descriptive touches laying stress on different qualities, while its salient features are displayed again and again throughout the novel in a host of different incidents and actions so varied and changeful that the reader never finds them repetitious but is left with an indelible impression of the character. Even minor characters occupying little space in the novel are depicted basically in the same manner. This is consistent with life. We gain a clearer and clearer understanding of men and women in real life and of their individual traits through experience accumulated over a long period. In

literature and art the experience is more concentrated, while many irrelevant trifles are cut out.

A splendid tradition of the Chinese novel is the creation of numerous characters in one work. *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms,* our earliest successful novel, appeared first in the fourteenth or fifteenth century. It presents a vast panorama of life with dozens of unforgettable characters, including such well-known and typical figures as Chuko Liang, Tsao Tsao and Chang Fei. However, for various reasons, this early work contains few detailed descriptions and the language lacks vitality. It is interesting to study the way in which vivid and typical characters were built up in this book without detailed descriptions but by presenting their special features again and again through different events and actions. In this case the lack of descriptions made no decisive difference; but in general the art of the novel demands a meticulous depiction of life. *Water Margin,* an equally great novel on the grand scale, obviously has advanced further in the use of descriptive detail and vivid language. The many characters in *Water Margin* have clearly defined personalities, and not a few like Li Kuei have become accepted as types. *The Pilgrimage to the West* deals with a different world, a mythical world, yet Monkey, Pigsy and other typical characters in it are also household words. In characterization, descriptive detail and the use of language, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* inherits and further develops this tradition, reaching the highest peak of achievement in the art of the Chinese novel.

The Dream of the Red Chamber came after another famous novel about a family, *Chin Ping Mei.* But judged as a whole, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is much greater. Of course, the sordid events and characters presented in *Chin Ping Mei* are truthful too. We must admit this, however much we may dislike them. But the general public much prefers reading *The Dream of the Red Chamber.* There are more reasons than one for this. Probably one deep-lying reason is that reading a great work of literature is like a rich experience of life. We cannot be satisfied with nothing but darkness, vulgarity and filth, but must hope for something good and beautiful also.

The works that move men most are usually those which not only depict stern reality but are infused with poetry. This poetry

comes out in the positive characters and actions, in the glimmering of an ideal which the author links with certain characters and actions, in nobility discovered in humble folk and ordinary life, or in the penetrating, passionate exposure of what is moribund and negative. It is something, at any rate, present in real life. And this is an indispensable element in literature and art. Instead of beautifying life in some artificial way, writers with ideals, in whose hearts burn passionate love and hate, are inevitably aware of the poetry of real life and feel constrained to express it.

Men are interested in all life's manifestations. The boundless plain of life holds no forbidden grounds for literature and art. None the less, it is natural for men to wish to find beauty in ordinary life, to see the sunshine breaking through the clouds, to discover what is noble, gentle and good in the human heart. *The Dream of the Red Chamber,* although it deals mainly with the exploiting class and a corrupt, decadent family in this class, also presents the other side, the slaves and rebels of this kingdom of darkness. Because cruelty, filth and hypocrisy have not succeeded in stifling poetry and ideals, we can read this book again and again without wearying. For we find there not pessimism and disillusion but love, the search for beauty and goodness, the strength of hope, courage and youth.

Many works give realistic descriptions of the trivia of life without producing unforgettable characters. There are others which create convincing characters yet arouse no emthusiasm among their readers. The basic reason is that they lack poetry, lack an ideal. In other words, the author has no deep understanding of life, no passionate love or hate, no lofty outlook. The prevalence of this type of "anaemia" in art heightens the significance of the full-blooded splendour of a novel permeated with poetry and ideals.

Such a work is *The Dream of the Red Chamber.* With incomparable artistic skill it presents a picture of feudal society as complex, natural and rich as life itself, creating enough vivid and typical characters to fill a long portrait gallery. By this means it lays bare the rottenness of the feudal ruling class, the cruelty and hypocrisy of feudalism, the inferior status of women in that society. Yet in that dark, vicious world it also shows us the pure, beautiful love of young people, rebels against the feudal order, and their search for a rational and happy life. Indeed these significant passages

are the most outstanding part of the novel and make the work shine with poetry and ideals. This is the book's main content. Thus its entire message and impact could not but be to condemn the whole feudal system.

This is not to say that we can find no traces in the novel of feudal ideas. Tsao Hsueh-chin came from a noble family and lived during the last prosperous period of the last feudal dynasty in China. His family's decline and his own exclusion from the ranks of the nobility helped him to see the iniquities of feudal society. Yet inevitably he retained certain feudal ideas which find expression in his work. For instance, the novel reveals his hankering after the splendour which he had lost and his admiration of the imperial rule. However, these things occupy a very small place in the whole novel and do not impair its total significance and impact or weaken the main condemnation of feudalism. The novel also contains the negative concepts of "vanity," "dreams" and "illusions," but these are outweighed by positive, progressive ideas. Living when he did, Tsao Hsueh-chin could not have discredited feudalism completely. In this respect, we find a remarkable discrepancy between his own views and the book's effect on others. His own understanding of certain characters and episodes is at variance with their objective effect. This is true in the case of Pao-yu's parents, Pao-chai, Hsi-jen and even Sister Feng. Modern critics often mention the episode in which the village headman Wu Chih-hsiao hands in the rents to Chia Chen. There the author was simply concerned to show the family's precarious financial state, but what strikes us is the way in which its wealth came from exploitation of the peasants. This, of course, is something which the author himself could not have felt.

In conclusion, I want to say something about the last forty chapters by Kao Ngo. Kao Ngo's great contribution lies in the fact that his supplement helped to popularize Tsao Hsueh-chin's work. If not for the 120-chapter edition, the book might not have won such wide recognition. For not only was this a movable-type edition, whereas the earlier eighty chapters had circulated in manuscript form; but even if the first eighty chapters had been printed, the lack of an ending to the story, especially to the romance of Pao-yu and Tai-yu, would have made it less acceptable to the general public than a complete novel.

Undoubtedly the supplement has its merits too. Most of the episodes follow on fairly well from the first eighty chapters. The love of Pao-yu and Tai-yu ends in tragedy and is on the whole moving, while some other episodes are well handled too, as for example, Pao-yu's marriage to Pao-chai. Although Tsao Hsueh-chin would probably have treated this differently, Kao Ngo has presented it quite convincingly. The accounts of the shrew Hsia Chin-kuei, of Chia Cheng's appointment to an official post and of Hsi-jen's marriage, are fairly well written and in keeping with their characters. These are some of the good points of the last forty chapters.

The fact that Kao Ngo adhered to Tsao Hsueh-chin's intention by making the love story between Pao-yu and Tai-yu end in tragedy is the basic reason or the acceptance of his supplement. However, when it came to another important theme of the novel, the decline of the Chia House, Kao Ngo succumbed to the convention of a happy ending which was entirely contrary to Tsao Hsueh-chin's plan, and in this way he greatly weakened the tragic impact of the whole novel. In his version, after the Chias had their property confiscated by the government, they were not ruined completely for Pao-yu's father retained his noble title and his estate was returned to him. In the end, "Of the families of Lord Jung and Lord Ning, the good cultivated their virtue while the wicked repented of their sins, so that the family flourished once more and regained its former wealth." Thus Kao Ngo trumped up an arbitrary, inconsistent ending for Tsao Hsuch-chin's unfinished tragedy with its powerful exposure of the collapse of feudal society.

The fundamental artistic weakness of the last forty chapters lies in the fact that Kao Ngo often imitates and repeats episodes from the earlier part without bringing them to life. After the first eighty chapters the story is moving towards the final decline of the Chia family, the denouement of the lovers' tragedy and the fate of the different characters. What scope here for fresh realism, for heart-stirring scenes! Yet with the exception of a few gripping episodes, most of the supplement is unimaginative and monotonous, for it clumsily imitates and repeats *ad nauseam* the events of the first eighty chapters.

Admittedly there are defects and gaps in the first eighty chapters too, but on the whole these are so brilliantly written that the minor blemishes cannot dim the splendour of this magnificent work. Kao Ngo's last forty chapters are not without their merits, yet they embody too many weaknesses which are for the most part related to fundamental aspects of the author's outlook and technique. These throw into strong relief the surpassing excellence of the original work. Tsao Hsueh-chin's *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is the crowning achievement of the art of the Chinese classical novel.

Pear Trees and Birds ▶
by Lin Feng-mien
See the article on the artist on p. 101.

WU SHIH-CHANG

History of "The Red Chamber Dream"

1. Introduction

The present complete version of the eighteenth-century novel, *The Red Chamber Dream,* consists of 120 chapters, of which the first 80 chapters were originally written by Tsao Hsueh-chin (曹雪芹) who died* before he could have finished the novel, and the last forty are known to be the work of Kao Ngo (高鶚). This 120-chapter version was first published in 1791 by Cheng Wei-yuan (程偉元) and revised and reprinted in 1792. Most current editions of the novel have come from the 1792 version. But before that date for more than 20 years the novel had been known as *A Record on a Stone* (石頭記 *Shih-tou Chi*) in 80 chapters annotated by Chih-yen Chai (脂硯齋). It was sold in "temple markets" in hand-written transcriptions for "scores of silver-taels" per copy. The book generally bore the title "Chih-yen Chai Annotated *Shih-tou Chi.*" As it had only 80 chapters, or roughly two-thirds of the whole novel, it goes without saying that most of the stories in the novel are incomplete. The publication of the "complete," yet comparatively cheap, 120-chapter version in 1791-2 has, on the one hand, ousted all the expensive,

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* Tsao died in the last day of the lunar year Kuei-wei (1763). According to the solar calendar, the last day falls on February 1, 1764.

unannotated, manuscript copies in the market and, on the other, greatly increased the circulation—and popularity—of the novel. Before the publication of an old version in 80 chapters in 1911, for more than a century most readers of the novel did not know that the first 80 and the last 40 chapters were written by two different authors and very few people knew the existence of an 80-chapter manuscript version annotated by Chih-yen Chai. It was in 1927 when a fragmentary copy of 16 chapters of the annotated version was discovered that people began to realize the importance of the manuscript version which is certainly much closer to the author's original work. But this manuscript copy had been kept by Hu Shih for his exclusive personal use for more than 30 years without seeing the light, and it was only after liberation that another annotated 78-chapter manuscript version was photographically reprinted (1954) and made available to scholars. In addition many works of Tsao Hsueh-chin's friends have been discovered and reproduced. In the light of these priceless materials it is now possible to reconstruct not only the life story of the author and his family background, but also the process in which the novel was written and revised. With the help of Chih-yen Chai's annotation and comments, which reveal the author's original plan of the novel he had known and the author's lost manuscripts he had seen, we can even reconstruct stories in the later part of the novel according to Tsao's plan. By comparison with Kao Ngo's last 40 chapters, we can see the discrepancies of the two parts and probe into the causes for this disagreement between the two authors.

2. The Tsao Family and the Life of the Author

Tsao Chan (曹霑 better known as Tsao Hsueh-chin 1715-64), the author of the novel, was born in a rich and cultured family in Nanking. The Tsaos had been naturalized Manchus since the beginning of the Ching dynasty in the seventeenth century, but their cultural background was entirely that of the Han Chinese. His (adopted) grandfather Tsao Yin (曹寅) was a well-known poet, playwright, collector and publisher of rare books and a great patron of men-of-letters in Nanking, where he held the

hereditary office of Commissioner of Imperial Silk Textile Factories until his death in 1712 at fifty-one. Tsao Yin when a boy was Emperor Kang-hsi's Reading Companion and later a cadet in the Imperial Bodyguard. Throughout his life he enjoyed the Emperor's confidence and friendship. The latter made five Royal Excursions to the South, and on four occasions he sojourned in Tsao Yin's headquarters. Tsao Yin's elder daughter was married to Prince Nersu (訥尔蘇) on 30 November 1706. These grand occasions, as we now understand from a study of Chih-yen Chai's commentary on the novel, were the background material the author used to create the grandiose story of the visit to her parents by a noble court lady Yuan-chun (元春), the elder sister of the hero Chia Pao-yu (賈寶玉) in the novel.

When Tsao Hsueh-chin was born, Tsao Yin was, however, dead long ago. Yin's office was inherited by his only son Tsao Yung (曹顒 1694-1715) who again died after 3 years in office, leaving no heir to continue the line. The Tsaos were then faced with bankruptcy, as they had previously exhausted their coffers by playing host to the emperor and his huge retinue. The emperor then decreed that a nephew of Tsao Yin, namely Tsao Fu (曹頫), should be adopted as heir to Yin so that Fu could inherit the Commissionership vacated by Tsao Yung's premature death. Our author Tsao Hsueh-chin, son of Tsao Fu, has now become the legal grandson of the famous Tsao Yin. His own grandfather was Tsao Yin's beloved younger twin-brother Tsao Hsuan (曹宣), also a poet and painter.

In 1728, during the reign of the next emperor Yung-cheng, Tsao Fu was dismissed from his Commissionership and the Tsao house was raided and most of their properties confiscated. They were, however, left with some means to live on and the Tsaos moved to Peking with Yin's library in the same year. As Hsueh-chin lived in Nanking up to the age of thirteen, he was old enough to remember the past glory of his father's days and to have been imbued with his "grandfather's" refined cultural tradition. His novel was therefore often referred to by his friends as "his old dream in Nanking . . . the glory and splendour there," or as "his old dream of Yangchow," "his dream of his . . . deserted pavilions and dilapidated towers," etc.

The Tsaos were rehabilitated in 1735 by the next emperor Chien-lung, and Tsao Fu was given a minor post in the Board of Home Affairs. Tsao Hsueh-chin was for some time a student in the Imperial Academy and later on he held a sort of Assistantship in the Royal Clan School where he made friends with the two Manchu poets Tun Min (敦敏) and his brother Tun Cheng (敦誠). For reasons still unknown to us, the Tsaos seem to have suffered another decline of their fortunes, and by the time when Tsao Hsueh-chin was writing his novel from 1744 onwards, he was living in a cottage in a "yellow-leaved village" west of Peking, with hardly enough to feed his family. He was, however, always in high spirits and his eloquence and witty conversation and his sense of humour were well known among his friends. Apart from his work on the novel, he wrote poems and painted pictures which he sold to buy wine and to entertain his friends.

Tsao Hsueh-chin's death on the first of February 1764* was caused by his excessive sorrow over the death of his own son a few months earlier, and for lack of medical treatment during his illness. He left his "newly married wife" unprovided for and his novel unfinished. Of his poems, so much loved by his friends, only a few lines quoted in Chih-yen Chai's commentary and in Tun Cheng's work are extant. Those poems in the novel attributed to the hero and the male and female characters cannot be taken as representing his best work.

3. The Commentator of the Author's Manuscript

Tsao Yin in his poems often refers to his versatile third and fourth nephews, i.e. sons of his younger brother Tsao Hsuan. The third nephew, who painted long branches (plum blossoms) very well, was Tsao Chi (曹頎); while his fourth nephew is only known in Yin's poems by the boy's courtesy name, Chu-chien (竹磵). Thus Tsao Hsueh-chin's own father Tsao Fu was either Hsuan's first or second son, and Chu-chien was Hsueh-chin's

* There are two theories about the date of his death, another being 12 February 1763.

youngest uncle (*shu*). By a careful study of all the names of the Tsao brothers and cousins since Tsao Yin's generation in general, all of them coined from phrases taken from the *Book of Songs* (詩經) and the *Book of History* (書經), and an examination of the courtesy name Chu-chien in particular, it is most likely that Chu-chien's name was Shih (頃) taken from the *Book of Songs* in the folk song of Wei, namely *Kao Pan* (考槃). As "*shih*" in old curly script is similar to "*yen*" (硯) in Chih-yen Chai, we are able to identify this commentator as the youngest uncle of the author.

This identification can be further substantiated by internal evidence in the commentary itself. For instance, when the high-ranking court lady Yuan-chun in the novel (i.e. Yin's daughter in the Tsao house) came to visit her parents and caressed her younger brother Chia Pao-yu, the hero in the novel, Chih-yen Chai in his comment identifies himself as the hero and refers to the lady as "my late elder sister." Numerous other comments all explicitly point to the fact that the commentator Chih-yen Chai was really the model for the hero Chia Pao-yu. This evidence is fully in accordance with a statement by Yu Jui (裕瑞 1771-1838), an early critic of the novel, that the hero in the novel was not the author, but one among his younger uncles, and that the commentator Chih-yen Chai is the name of one of his younger uncles. As Yu Jui did not reach this conclusion by a careful study of the commentary as we do, it is evident that his information has come from a quite independent source. Indeed he confessed that he heard the information about the novel and its author from "my elderly relatives." As we know that Yu Jui's maternal uncles (舅父) were Ming I (明義) and Ming Lin (明琳), both close friends of the author, it is obvious that his information about the author Tsao Hsueh-chin and the commentator Chih-yen Chai has come from Ming I and Ming Lin. This identification of the commentator with the hero of the novel has categorically disproved the "autobiography" theory, first advocated by Hu Shih and followed by many a "*Red*ologist."

With the identification of the commentator, many hitherto puzzling points in the novel and its commentary can be easily resolved. For instance, since our author was born a few years after Tsao Yin's death and many years after Emperor Kang-hsi's

Southern Excursions and the marriage of Yin's elder daughter to Prince Nersu, how could he describe these grand occasions in the story of the court lady's visit to her parents? There is a strong suspicion that these materials were obviously supplied to the author by his uncle Chih-yen Chai, the commentator and model for the hero in the novel.

4. Chih-yen Chai's Contribution to the Study of the Novel

Chih-yen Chai was not only the author's uncle, but also his friend and collaborator. His comments were not written merely for the benefit of the readers, but also for the author and his friends and relatives. Chih-yen Chai praised and criticized the novel, encouraged and advised the author to revise some of his stories in the early draft. He first wrote his commentary sometime before 1754, that is, before the fourth or fifth revision of the novel by the author. Thus his early comments proceeded almost simultaneously with the writing of the novel. It is even possible to ascribe the authorship of some stories in the novel to Chih-yen Chai, for the visit of Emperor Kang-hsi and stories based on actual episodes in Tsao Yin's life took place long before the author's birth, and yet Chih-yen Chai in his commentary often says: "This was what I saw with my own eyes," or "these words are still ringing in my ear."

The information covered by Chih-yen Chai's commentary is broad and varied. It includes such important items as the "inside story" of the novel, actual episodes in the life of the Tsao house, the proportion of true stories (*chen shih* 眞事) of the Tsaos to those created by the author (*chia shih* 假事 or 賈事) in the novel, the author's original plan, over-all plot, and "fundamental theme" of the novel, his earlier draft and title of the novel, his revision of stories in the previous draft, etc. The commentary gives numerous cross-references to earlier and later stories as well as clues in early stories that lead to later ones which are now lost. It informs the reader of stories and chapter-titles in the author's unfinished part of the novel, about the author's original manuscripts lost by borrowers, and the contents

of these lost manuscripts, about the endings of the main characters and the denouement in the author's unfinished draft. Without the commentary we would never have been able to tackle all the problems which are now resolved,* or to reconstruct those lost stories in the author's draft after the eightieth chapter. Furthermore, the dating of the author and stories about other members in the author's family also depend largely on information sifted from the commentary.

An interesting example of such information in the commentary is the revelation that the author's younger brother Tsao Tang-tsun (棠村) had written a number of "short prefaces" to many chapters of the early draft which Tang-tsun called *A Precious Mirror for Romantic Life* (風月寶鑑 *Feng-yueh Pao-chien*). In the present 120-chapter version only the preface to the first chapter of the novel has been preserved by the sheer incident that it was mistaken for the author's own "Foreword." Many other "prefaces" to the later chapters have been preserved in the early manuscript versions, but they have been mistaken for Chih-yen Chai's "general comments" by many "*Red*ologists."

5. The Setting of the Novel

The panoramic activities of the characters in the novel took place in the Chia Mansions and their adjacent "Grand View Garden" (大觀園). The broad setting of the stories was apparently in Peking, but the background of the author's "old dream," that is, the Grand View Garden itself, was in fact Tsao Yin's old garden, referred to in his poems, as the "West Court" (西堂) or "West Pond" (西池) in his Nanking headquarters. This garden passed into the hand of Tsao Fu's successor Sui Ho-teh in 1728, and it was later owned by a leading poet Yuan Mei and was re-named Sui Yuan, "the Garden of Indolence." In the novel the furniture and house decoration in the "Grand View Garden" were those of the northern fashion while the flora

* I refer to those problems resolved in my book *On The Red Chamber Dream*, The Clarendon Press, O.U.P., Oxford, 1961.

remained that of the Yangtse Valley in order to keep its background alive. The claim made by Yuan Mei that his Sui Yuan was previously the site of the "Grand View Garden" was based on information contained in Ming I's note on his 20 poems in praise of the female characters in the novel. Yuan Mei in fact had not seen the novel when he made this claim in his *Sui-yuan Shih-hua*. Just as Tsao Yin's daughter, wife of Prince Nersu, was the model for the court lady Yuan-chun, and Kang-hsi's sojourn at Yin's "West Court" was the "blue print" of Yuan-chun's visit to her parents' home in the novel, so was the "West Court" the model and "blue print" of the "Grand View Garden." And there is internal evidence in the early part of the novel which illustrates habits of daily life in Nanking rather than in Peking. In pointing out these facts we do not mean that the broad setting of the novel was not in Peking. It merely emphasizes the truism that stories in a fiction need not have happened in one city.

6. The Author's Earlier Plan

Tsao Hsueh-chin at first envisaged writing a poetic play of what later turned out to be his novel, according to Chih-yen Chai, hence it abounds with songs and poems. His plan of writing the play does not seem to have been carried very far before it was abandoned in favour of the novel. But the title *Hung-lou Meng* (Red Chamber Dream) was no doubt originally designed for the play, as the four masterpieces of the most popular Ming playwright Tang Hsien-tsu (湯顯祖) were then known as the "Four Dreams of Lin-chuan" (臨川四夢)—Lin-chuan being Tang's native town.

We now know that before the circulation from 1754 to 1791 of the 80-chapter version *Shih-tou Chi* with Chih-yen Chai's commentary in transcribed copies, there were at least two old drafts: one was called *Hung-lou Meng*, the other, *Feng-yueh Pao-chien* (*A Precious Mirror for Romantic Life*). The former, probably a short version, was shown by the author to Ming I, whose 20 poems on the characters in it suggest that the main stories therein

were in fact complete to the end, but some of them were different from those in his revised 80 chapters which we now have.

In the old draft, the *Feng-yueh Pao-chien*, the whole novel consisted of 100 chapters. During the revision more than two-thirds of them were expanded to eighty chapters, as are now found in the annotated *Shih-tou Chi* (*A Record on a Stone*). The remainder, known to Chih-yen Chai to have consisted of 30 chapters, was yet to be expanded or revised by the author. Tang-tsun's preface in the present 42nd chapter refers to its preceding chapter as the "38th," revealing thereby that the division of chapters in the old draft was different from that of the extant eighty, in which there are still vestiges of the old, e.g. chapters 17, 18 are undivided, chapters 19, 75 and 80 are without titles.

The last thirty chapters of the author's old draft have been lost, but some of their titles are preserved in the commentary. From these titles quoted by Chih-yen Chai, either wholly or partly, one can gain some insight in the later part of the novel as planned by the author. A complete couplet of a chapter-title reads:

Borrowing Other's Works Hsueh Pao-chai Offered Her Implied Admonition (薛寶釵借詞含諷諫)
Realizing Her Own Fate Wang Hsi-feng Made a Heroic Stand (王熙鳳知命强英雄)

Another couplet, cut short in Chih-yen Chai's quotation, says:

. . . in the Cold Winter Swallowed Pickled Vegetable (. . . . 寒冬噎酸虀)
. . . at a Snowy Night Had Only Tattered Rugs to Wrap Himself (. . . . 雪夜圍破氈)

A single line that can be reconstructed in eight characters reads:

In the Prison God Temple Chien-hsueh Consoled Pao-yu (獄神廟茜雪慰寶玉)

Yet another single line in seven, instead of eight, characters says:

Hua Hsi-jen Was Consistent from Beginning to End (花襲人有始有終)

All these titles show that stories in the later part of the author's draft were very different from what we now found in the last 40 chapters of the present version completed by Kao Ngo. The hero Chia Pao-yu, for instance, was left with practically no food and clothes in the end. He was even jailed, for reasons unknown to us, and had to be consoled or perhaps helped to escape by his former maid Chien-hsueh. The last example quoted above shows that in the old draft couplets of chapter-titles were not necessarily all in lines of eight characters as they are in the expanded *Shih-tou Chi*. Other titles quoted by Chih-yen Chai relate such stories as "Raid and Confiscation" (抄沒), *Songs of the Ten Lonely Ones* (十獨吟) and "Wei Jo-lan in the Archery Stadium" (衛若蘭射圃). The last chapter in the author's manuscript recounted "Pao-yu's letting loose his hands on a hanging cliff" (寶玉懸崖撒手) i.e. deserting his home to become a monk. According to Chih-yen Chai, the author had finished writing five or six chapters of the stories about the "Raid and Confiscation," the "Prison God Temple" and the "Archery Stadium" but they were lost by a borrower in or before 1767, three years after the author's death.

Tsao Hsueh-chin's original plan for the novel was grander and more tragic than the present 120-chapter version with a comparatively happy ending for the decadent Chia House. In the later part of the old draft there were four "turning-points" marking the successive stages of the fall of the Chia House and the profound psychological changes of the hero: (1) the deaths of the court lady Yuan-chun, elder sister of the hero, (2) the death of his sweetheart, the heroine Lin Tai-yu (林黛玉), (3) the raid on the house and (4) the escape of the hero to a monastery. The fall of the Chias was caused by the evil deeds of Chia Sheh (賈赦), Wang Hsi-feng and others, the misconduct of their youngsters in complicity with rascals, and the Chia's relationship with other big families which were charged with crimes. As a result, all the members of the house were scattered just as "monkeys were scattered after the fall of the tree," and the two big mansions were in the end burned down by a great fire. In the *Epilogue* to the songs of *The Red Chamber Dream* (chapter 5) the author sums up in a vivid picture the last scene of this great tragedy as the curtain falls:

When the food is over, all the birds return to the wood.
What is left is a vast clear ground, truly clean and good.
(好一似食盡鳥投林，落了片白茫茫大地眞乾淨)

7. Reconstructed Stories in the Author's Lost Manuscripts

With the help of clues in the early chapters and the commentary it is now possible to reconstruct at least some of the stories in the author's original draft. The death of the heroine Lin Tai-yu and the marriage of Hsueh Pao-chai to the hero Pao-yu against his will, both taking place not long after the 80th chapter, had profoundly changed Pao-yu's attitude towards life. He was so unhappy about his marriage that he had "nothing to talk with his wife about their old days" when they were young children playing in the "Grand View Garden." When his chief maid Hsi-jen was going to be married to his friend the actor Chiang Yu-han, he set free all the bondmaids in his house, except Sheh-yueh, whom he kept on Hsi-jen's advice. In the calamity that befell the Chia House, he was among those imprisoned. The two maids Hung-yu and Chien-hsueh, who had left him in the earlier days, now come to assist and console him and others in the prison. After having been released, he was extremely impoverished and his old friend the actor Chiang and his wife the erstwhile maid Hsi-jen both came to support him and his wife Pao-chai. For a time he might have worked on a farm where he came across the peasant girl Erh Ya-tou who once taught him how to spin cotton in a village.

The machinations of the corrupt strategist Wang Hsi-feng turned out to be boomerangs against herself. Her crimes, which cost directly or indirectly at least five lives, in the end landed her in jail. She was however released with the help of the maid Hung-yu and, possibly, her husband Chia Yun and his friend Ni Erh the Drunken Diamond. She was then divorced by her once henpecked husband, Chia Lien, who then married her maid Ping-erh as his wife. In spite of the "heroic stand" put up by the crestfallen Phoenix (Hsi-feng), she was eventually sent back to

her parents' house in Nanking where she soon died, possibly a violent death.

Wang Hsi-feng's only daughter Chiao-chieh was later sold by the girl's uncle, i.e. Wang's own brother, to a brothel. The poor girl was accidently found by the grateful old peasant woman Liu the granny, who rescued her and took her to the village where she was married to Liu's grandson Pan-erh. Chiao-chieh was at last able to earn her own living by spinning and weaving on the farm. From clues in the early chapters and in the commentary we know that the endings of other characters such as Pao-yu's female second cousin Shih Hsiang-yun, his half-sister Tan-chun, his cousin Hsi-chun, and his sister-in-law Li Huan, are more or less different from what are described in Kao Ngo's supplementary chapters.

8. Kao Ngo's Alteration of Tsao's Original Stories

When the complete novel of 120 chapters appeared in 1791 and in the next year a revised edition was published, considerable alterations had been made in the process of redaction by Kao Ngo and Cheng Wei-yuan, although in their "Foreword" they claim that the alterations were made merely for a better reading of the text. Kao Ngo in fact made substantial changes effecting both the stories and the characterization of the main figures in the novel. In his attempt to "improve" Tsao Hsueh-chin's style, Kao's revision has sometimes made the Peking dialect affected and artificial, at other times rendered the text ungrammatical and illogical, made wrong references to ancient classics, or obscured passages which reveal the background of the novel.

But by far the most significant alterations were made in those stories related to the characterization of the personalities in the novel. By creating new people and resurrecting a dead one, Kao Ngo altered the story of Pao-yu's secret visit to the dying girl Ching-wen, and thereby rendered some related stories in Tsao Hsueh-chin's original work into isolated incidents. His further excision of passage in the same story has obliterated Tsao's favourable description of the wronged girl. On the other hand,

by altering passages unfavourable to Wang Hsi-feng, Kao has mitigated this vicious character. In the story of the hero's visit to a village, the revised text greatly distorts the "positive side" of the hero's personality and made him appear no more than an unprincipled coxcomb interested in any girl he met. In order to prepare for his own story about the hero's willingness to take the *Chu-jen* examination in the supplement, Kao Ngo excised long passages describing Chia Cheng's pride in Pao-Yu's achievement in poetry, and his decision not to urge the boy to read the eight-section essays for the examination. All these alterations were made to eliminate any adverse criticism implicit in the description of the decadent feudal society in the original text, or to prepare for his own stories in the supplement.

This aim of Kao's revision is even more obvious in his expunction of passages directly attacking social institutions of the time, such as the hero's "burning of books" used in preparation for the official examinations, and in his interpolation of passages eulogizing the "sage emperor." In the introductory mythological story discussing the theme of the novel, Tsao Hsueh-chin makes it quite clear that his book is not "a love story for love story's sake," but a social novel with a definite educative purpose. It contains passages which "point at the treacherous, rebuke the sycophantic, denounce the evil or castigate the perverse." Tsao Hsueh-chin declares, in the words of the "stone," that he had no intention to please the public and he warns his readers that to some people his may be an unpleasant book. Kao Ngo has expunged all these lengthy passages and, by adding a few words, has skilfully given a Buddhist twist to the theme of the novel, making it appear from the very beginning to be no more than a perfectly harmless love story with a tragic ending. At the end of the supplement Kao Ngo again emphasizes this point by saying that the whole novel is "no more than a sport of the pen-and-ink."

Kao Ngo lived under the reign of Chien-lung when Literary Inquisitions were repeatedly launched with relentless severity. Not only writers of politically offensive books were punishable by the death penalty, but sellers and readers of such books were also liable to be persecuted. That this novel was considered to have contained "offensive remarks" (違礙語) was pointed out by Hung-wu (弘昨), a cousin of Emperor Chien-lung, in his note

on the three poems in praise of the novel by his nephew Yung-chung (永忠). Since it was well known that Kao Ngo was the writer of the supplement and editor of the whole novel, he naturally had to take precautions against possible trouble. But as there were in 1792 numerous transcribed copies of the old 80-chapter version *Shih-tou Chi* still in circulation, any expunction on political grounds of original passages in the printed "complete" version could have been easily detected. Therefore in his revision Kao Ngo had to interpolate other stories and individual passages on the pretext that he did so for a better reading of the text "after having collated many different old versions."

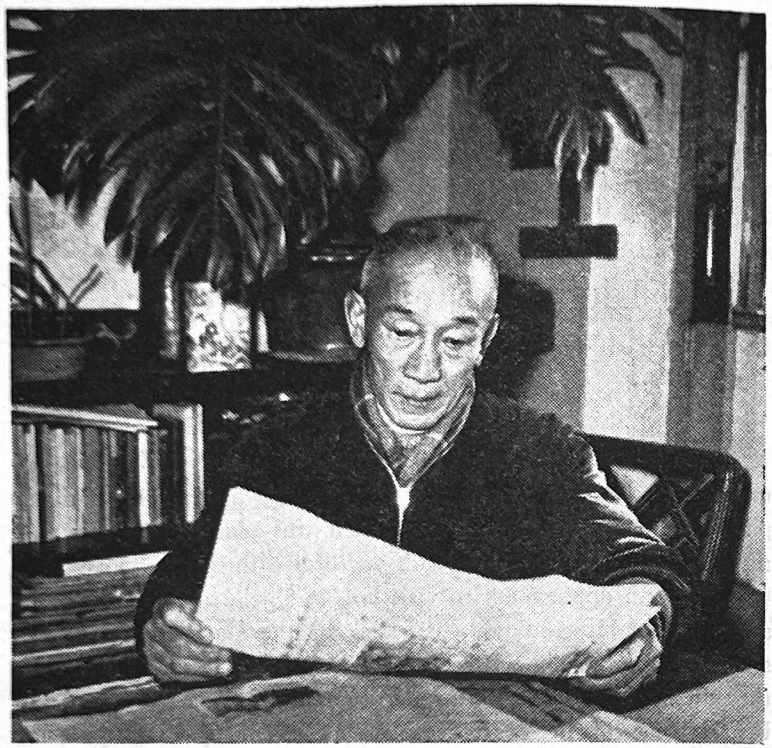
MI KU

Lin Feng-mien's Paintings

A year ago, arriving in Peking from a sketching trip, Lin Feng-mien greeted me with: "You will be seeing an exhibition of my paintings next year!" His excitement was plain. His hair was turning white yet he spoke with youthful enthusiasm. Last winter, I had an opportunity to visit him in Shanghai. As soon as I stepped into his studio I was struck by the many new paintings stacked on the shelves. Carefully, I leafed through them. Though they differed in subject-matter and content, all of them showed Lin Feng-mien's distinctive touch. Mellow as a cup of grape wine with a fine bouquet, they filled me with a sense of beauty and carried me into a realm of fancy. I recalled some old sayings: "Painting comes from the heart"; "A painting from the heart shows the character of the artist." Or, as people also say nowadays: "We see the artist in his painting," and "The style of painting reflects the artist's personality": all this is especially true of Lin Feng-mien's art.

Lin Feng-mien is a well-known painter of the older generation. He is now over sixty years of age, but his paintings have a spirit of youthful buoyancy and optimism. They are rich in feeling. He has a profound feeling for whatever he paints, be it a blade of grass or a tree. He does not affect the bizarre; his style is simple and natural, but it carries the viewer into a realm of poetry.

Mi Ku, a well-known cartoonist, was born in Chekiang in 1919. He graduated at the Lu Hsun Art Academy in Yenan.



Lin Feng-mien in his study

Lin Feng-mien is also a skilled oil painter. He lived for quite a time in Paris and was influenced by impressionism of the later period and the "Fauves" group of painters. After his return to China he continued to paint in oils and at that time was one of the pioneers in the western way of painting. His many landscapes and figure paintings done in strong, vivid colours and his large paintings, *Humanity* and *Suffering*, were well-known. They were all destroyed during the War of Resistance Against Japan, but they left a deep impression on all who saw them. But he also loved and loves painting in the traditional style and believes that it is possible to adopt and combine the best from both the Chinese and the western schools. He considers that Chinese art excels in landscape painting and that the personal sentiments

of the artist can be particularly well expressed in this genre. However, he is not satisfied with the means of expression in ordinary traditional Chinese painting; he wants to enrich them by adapting certain of the western techniques. Thus it was that from the later part of the 1920's to the 1940's, drawing on knowledge of oil painting, he made many experiments in this line. For some time he worked hard in the seclusion of his studio, but in the last ten years he has made many field trips with other veteran artists, visiting the great rivers and famous mountains of the country, seeking to evolve a new personal style with a national flavour. As his recent paintings show, his hard work has produced good results.

Lin Feng-mien holds that art cannot be a mere copy of nature but should be an evocation of its essence and spirit, therefore he is never satisfied with superficial, but lifeless, reproductions of landscapes or objects. He once remarked that art should portray nature by reducing it to its few essential elements: "Simplification in painting should be based on a study of natural phenomena. . . . Faced with a complex combination of natural objects, the artist should seek to depict their colours and colour relations, their character and natural qualities as they manifest themselves to the eye, and absorb trivial or accidental phenomena into a complete, integrated concept."

He also believes that the necessary prerequisite in creating a work of art is an "emotional impulse" evoked in the artist as he views the landscape. These ideas find expression in his practice. Take for instance his Chinese ink painting, *Nightfall*. Hazy shadows shroud both banks of a small river; calm, pellucid water reflects the last rays of the sun, and a few wild ducks, as if forgetting to return home, skim through the reeds, flying into the boundless distance. Does such beauty exist in reality? We are sure we have seen such a scene somewhere. But it is not nature itself that is placed before us but a work of art produced by an artist answering the urge to express his feelings stirred by the natural scene. Generalizing the trivia of natural phenomena, discarding inessential details which impede the expression of his ideas, he succeeds in vividly recreating and depicting the beauty of this particular scene. He blends the characteristic elements of the landscape with his sentiments. Animated by a deep emotion, he

Wild Geese and Autumn Sky

presents an enchanting scene of misty twilight, so that even one who is no poet feels himself in a poetic mood. Isn't this then even more miraculous than real scenery? If natural scenery can be likened to the grain, then the artist's sentiment is the enzyme and the resulting successful painting is the intoxicating wine.

Next, take his *Wild-geese and Autumn Sky*. Similar in theme to *Nightfall* it produces quite a different effect on the viewer. The artist must have made many experiments to achieve such maturity of technique. His brushwork is more sparing and dexterous; the tone is purer than in his earlier works. A bleak autumn scene is evoked with a variety of washes and dry brush strokes; the water is the same colour as the sky; evening clouds and wild-geese sail by. It makes one sense the autumn breeze

ruffling one's clothes. These two paintings exemplify the artist's efforts to achieve various effects, to evoke various kinds of atmosphere.

Again, let us compare his paintings — *Cormorant Fishing* and *Mooring*. Both depict hills, water, clouds, and fishing boats but they evoke totally different atmospheres. The composition of the *Cormorant Fishing* is simple. The artist's feelings are conveyed through the simple image of a boat on a wide river. The rippling water beats against the artist's heart; the light fishing boat and the fishing net, diaphanous in the mist, sway with the waves; the birds spread their wings in the night breeze. All these images are like the notes of a clear fishing song echoing over the water and plucking at the artist's heart-strings, charming

Cormorant Fishing

and stirring him and compelling him to express his feelings through his paint-brush. If he himself had not been stirred, he would never have been able to create such a delightful painting evoking an immediate spiritual response from those who look at it. Though his *Mooring* is similar in tone to the *Cormorant Fishing*, it induces totally different sensations. Gauzelike mist and rain shrouding the green mountains give it a silvery grey tone. River and mountains merge together indistinguishably in the misty rain. Several fishing boats, drifting as dusk falls, increase the enchantment of this tranquil world. The scene calls to my mind the eighth-century poet Li Po's lines in praise of the Three Yangtse Gorges: "On both banks the monkeys howl incessantly, as my small boat drifts by the myriad mountains," and causes my imagination to soar above the soft waves and high mountains.

Mountains, water and boats are favourite subjects with Chinese painters. Many have produced delightful pictures of them. But those who lack the necessary depth of feeling, even though they have a mastery of the traditional technique — technical skill — fail to create pictures that move one and leave one unsatisfied. Lin Feng-mien's paintings of mountains, water and boats are not like that. They have an entirely fresh air. This is partly accounted for by his skilful introduction of elements of western technique, but the most important thing I think is his ability to catch the spirit of the scene he depicts, to "feel" it. If a scene arouses no emotion in an artist, his picture of that scene will inevitably be dry and uninteresting. The work of any artist with a normally healthy and deep feeling for nature must undoubtedly evoke a response from those who view his work. Lin Feng-mien knows this. His aim in adapting certain western techniques to the traditional style of painting is to reflect the spirit of the scenes he loves and to express his own feelings about these scenes more adequately.

Lin Feng-mien has more than once stated that he is still seeking to find the creative method best adapted to his purpose. The road to art is difficult, but it is also broad. Lin Feng-mien has drawn even more heavily on western techniques in several of his other works yet they still have a highly Chinese flavour. *Coxcomb*, *Red Maples* and *Autumn* are such works. They are all colourful and striking; they glitter with light and stir one with an inner

excitement. Coxcomb is a flower often painted by Chinese artists. Some painters are attracted by and paint its upright strength, others delight in its dazzling colour. But Lin Feng-mien's *Coxcomb* is different. He has painted a thick cluster of coxcombs to make a warm and vital painting. It is quite out of the ordinary. The green stalks beneath the red flowers and a green lemon shine like glittering emeralds dropped on a red carpet. The green and red set each other off; the coxcomb seems more striking and alive; the green appears more tender and bright. This rare colour contrast is the product of the creative interaction between the artist's perception and feeling and the subject of his painting. It is an exaggerated representation of reality, but it appears all the more truthful and lovely in that it is a concentrate of what the artist has seen and felt. This imparts to the whole picture a feeling of warmth, richness, and youthful vigour.

The maple leaves are turning red. That indicates autumn. *Red Maples* (see p. 10), the above-mentioned *Wild-geese and Autumn Sky* and *Autumn* depict the same season. Yet the approach in each case is different. *Wild-geese and Autumn Sky* reflects the chilliness of late autumn, while *Red Maples* shows a rich and mellow early autumn. The colour effects in *Red Maples* are astonishing; technically it is a *tour de force*. The sharply contrasting tones do not jar, but give a feeling of depth and warmth. The brushwork is strong; wet or dry the brush is expertly applied. The three houses with their white-washed walls and dark-tiled roofs are indispensable to the composition and colouring. Besides they clearly locate this attractive landscape as being south of the Yangtse River.

Autumn is different again. If we say Lin Feng-mien's water-colour paintings are lyrical, then *Autumn* brings us into a fairyland. Soft waters and hard rocks, high peaks and scudding clouds, red maples and green bamboos, brightness and dullness are all contrasted. Huts are seen in the forest, mountains appear behind houses and a clear stream meanders through the landscape. Complex images, magnificent colouring and a certain feeling of naiveté suggested by his technique combine to create a fabulous, strange symphony which transports the spectator into an enchanted realm.

Why should the artist turn a real scene into a fairyland? What does he want to achieve? It is hard to say. I think that even

Lin Feng-mien is hard put to it to answer. A beautiful scene always stirs the imagination and feelings of artists but the artistic images evoked differ according to the temperament, experience and ideas of the artists. Besides, Lin Feng-mien's way of painting is not simply a reproduction of what he sees. He paints according to the traditional method of the seventeenth-century artist Shih Tao: "Mountains and rivers are a part of me, and I am a part of them. I seek all sorts of mountains to make my sketches from. The mountains and rivers merge in me and re-appear on my paintings." In the process of creation, there is much room for imagination. So it is quite natural that he should make a fairyland out of an ordinary landscape. Do not such paintings stimulate our imaginations to yet more lovely fancies?

Figure painting is another of Lin Feng-mien's specialities. Learning beauty of form from ancient Chinese paintings and from Chinese classical drama, he has painted many young women. He specializes in depicting the calm, modesty and gentleness of women of the eastern world, but he does other types of figure painting too. I have seen some which are quite different from his usual figure paintings. These are a series based on some form of traditional opera. The modelling of the dramatic characters in them is greatly influenced by the figures of the Chinese shadow play. They are exaggerated and highly decorative with a thoroughly oriental flavour.

I like Lin Feng-mien's paintings for their original style. They are like a jewel in a treasure box; a rare flower in a garden. They may not be priceless jewels or the queen of flowers, yet they have a value all their own.

Chronicle

A Poetry Recital in Support of Cuba

Chinese poets have written poems to protest against the military blockade and military provocations of the U.S. government against the Republic of Cuba, and to pledge their support for the Cuban people in their fight for independence and sovereignty. Hundreds of poems have been published in newspapers and magazines in Peking and other cities, or broadcast and recited in meetings throughout the country. On November 8 last year at a poetry recital held in Peking, Chinese poets sounded a loud clarion call for mass support for Cuba.

The first poem recited at this meeting was *Dedicated to the Pearl of the Caribbean Sea,* written two years ago by our grand old man of letters Kuo Mo-jo hailing the Cuban people's revolutionary struggle. Then Tien Chien recited his new poem *Fidel,* expressing the deep admiration of six hundred and fifty million Chinese for the great helmsman of the Cuban revolution, Fidel Castro, and their determination to share all hardships with their comrades-in-arms in Cuba. Ping Hsin in *A Message from Far Away* sent her greetings to three Cuban women and said,

> At your revolutionary posts,
> Can you hear the steady thunder of steps
> As the Chinese people march towards you?
> Stand firm and fight on!
> The final victory must go to Cuba!

Yuan Chang-chin, who visited Cuba in 1961, recited these lines:

> Is it an inspection they want?
> The United States is the place:
> It swarms with atom bombs, hydrogen bombs, offensive weapons;
> With the largest, most dangerous missile bases
> To threaten world peace.

Kuo Hsiao-chuan in dignified, ringing tones paid tribute to Cuba's revolutionary leader in his poem *Fidel.* He said,

The name Fidel signifies honesty and faith;
He has gone through a forest of rifles
And a hail of bullets for his people.
The name Fidel signifies justice and truth;
Impartial history is solemnly making known
His mighty achievements.

Kuang Wei-jan in his long poem *Men of Iron* gave ardent praise to the seven million Cuban people, steeled and growing to full stature in a baptism of blood and fire. Other distinguished poets including Emi Siao, Tsang Keh-chia and Yuan Shui-po also contributed lines they had written.

Regino Pedroso Aldama, Charge d'Affaires *ad interim* of the Cuban Embassy in China attended the meeting and recited two of his own works, *Ours Is the Earth* and *Tomorrow*. His poems express boundless hatred of dollar imperialism and resolute faith in the outcome of the fight. The noted American writer Anna Louise Strong presented an extract from her long poem *Fidel — on Television November 1, 1962,* while Ahmed Kheir, a peace champion and poet from the Sudan, recited a poem expressing his love and concern as an African for the Cuban people. *Realization,* by the great Cuban poet Guillen, was also recited at the meeting.

These recitals met with a most enthusiastic response from the audience, whose applause and cries of approval rose loud as the angry waves of the Caribbean Sea.

An Early Edition of the "Strange Tales of Liao-chai"

Recently one volume of an early eighteen-volume edition of the *Strange Tales of Liao-chai* was found in Honan. This discovery is of great importance for the study of this eighteenth-century collection of Pu Sung-ling's short stories, some of which appeared in this journal No. 6, 1958 and No. 10, 1962.

Prior to this recent discovery, we knew only the sixteen-volume edition of this work printed in 1766. Yu Yueh, a scholar in the late nineteenth century, mentioned the existence of an eighteen-volume edition printed in 1785, but for a long time the truth of his statement was doubted.

This blue-covered edition is 19.3 centimetres long and 11.6 centimetres wide. The volume consists of forty pages and contains seventeen tales, one of which, "The Young Girl," is not to be found in the other edition.

According to the postscript to the newly discovered edition, this volume was printed in 1767. It embodies sharp criticism of the Ching dynasty which we do not find in the sixteen-volume edition. It was probably for this reason that this edition was suppressed by the Ching government and never widely circulated.

Fourteenth-century Tomb Murals

Near Tatung in the province of Shansi, Chinese archaeologists recently discovered a square fourteenth-century tomb with a brick dome. On a brick bed at the rear of the tomb was a large stone bier before which hung a silk curtain. The shrouded corpse on the bier was laid out in silk garments padded with cotton and covered with a yellow silk-padded quilt. The dead man was an old Taoist priest. According to the inscription on the stone tablet, he was buried nearly seven hundred years ago. Many pottery vessels were unearthed with utensils of wood and bronze, but the most valuable finds were the wall paintings.

The northern wall of the vault bears a landscape painting in Chinese ink 270 cm. long and 91 cm. high. This mural shows green hills wrapped in clouds and mist with luxuriant woods and blue, translucent water. At the foot of the hills are pines, cypresses and clear streams; in the distance there is a boat, in the foreground a thatched hut, to the left of which are three men dragging a sail. On the northern part of the eastern wall is a painting 96 cm. long and 90 cm. high of a man watching fish. Through a charming landscape runs a clear stream in which the fish can be seen, and on a rock near by under a green cypress to the left sits the old man watching the fish, while a page boy beside him holds a lyre-case. On the northern section of the western wall is another painting 92 cm. long and 95 cm. high of men discussing philosophy. One old man in a Taoist gown is sitting on a wooden pedestal under a tree talking with another on his left who is sitting on a boulder. Storks are painted on both sides of the entrance to the vault and on the ceiling; some are standing under pine trees and bamboos, other flying in the clouds. All these paintings show good composition and deft, concise brushwork. They are valuable specimens of fourteenth-century art.

Exhibition of Ancient Writing Materials in Nanking

An exhibition was recently held in Nanking of the "Four Treasures of the Studio": brushes, ink, paper and ink-stones. Here were brushes of all sizes and colours, including giant specimens with plumes four or five inches long used for writing large characters and small brushes with plumes less than half an inch long for writing very small characters. The plumes are made of the hair of the goat, rabbit, weasel, horse, bear and other animals inserted into a thin bamboo tube. One exhibit was a large grey brush with a shaggy plume made of the best hair from an old weasel's tail. When the weasel drags its tail through the snow, the weakest hairs are rubbed off and only the strongest left. This brush made of such hair is most resilient and despite its size retains a fine point.

This exhibition displayed slabs of Chinese ink in various pleasing shapes, often decorated with lively, vivid sketches or examples of calligraphy. The best Chinese ink is made in a special kiln in which the soot of burnt pine wood is collected, well mixed with scent and glue and set in moulds. One set of ink slabs exhibited, made in 1798, shows forty sights from Yuan Ming Yuan, or the old Imperial Garden in Peking. Each slab has a different shape, round, oblong, hexagonal, like a jade pendant or ancient tome. . . . The front is inscribed with the name of the sight while the reverse side shows the scenery and flowers, pavilions and terraces of the Imperial Garden. In 1860, the British and French troops who attacked Peking burnt and destroyed this garden. So this set of ink slabs is not only a good specimen of the art but a valuable historical relic as well.

Another interesting exhibit was the famed Hsuancheng bamboo paper, lustrous as jade. This paper is so absorbent that ink or colours quickly permeate it. At the same time it is extremely resilient and tough, reputed to last a thousand years. Most of the early Chinese calligraphy and painting still extant are executed on this type of paper. Another exhibit more than a thousand years old was yellow paper used to copy Buddhist sutras. This was dyed with the bark of the Chinese cork tree (*phellodendron amurense*) to preserve it from bookworms, and this specimen is still glossy and well preserved. Another paper inscribed by the celebrated calligrapher Tung Chi-chang of the late sixteenth century, though more than three hundred years old, looks fresh and new.

Chinese ink was generally ground on stones, but sometimes other materials were used as well. This exhibition presented all sorts of ink-stones, the oldest of which is shaped like a tray and dates from the first century. A green porcelain ink-stone from the Six Dynasties period (A.D. 222-589) is round with a convex centre and six feet. There were interesting examples made of brick, tiles and jade, and some fine specimens from Tuanchow in southern China and Shehhsi in central China, both noted for their excellent ink-stones.

Graphic Art from Latin America

The People's Art Publishing House in Peking has brought out an album entitled *Graphic Art from Latin America.* This volume introduces ninety-three woodcuts from Cuba, Mexico, Argentine, Brazil, Chile, Peru and Uruguay, which depict the awakening Latin American peoples and their united revolutionary struggles against the imperialists, colonialists and reactionaries, their fight for national independence, democracy and freedom. Works from Cuba such as *The Process of Revolution* by Carmelo Gonzelez, *In Memory of July 26* by Lesdia Vent DuBois, *Defending Our Sovereignty* and *Venceremos* by Aguilera give a vivid depiction in their different ways of the invincible heroism of the Cuban people and their triumphant overthrow of despotism and opposition to U.S. imperialist aggression.

The woodcuts from the other six countries also reveal striking national characteristics. By means of concise yet forceful lines and strong contrasts of black and white, these artists have created inspiring pictures of their people's struggle for the liberation of Latin America. They voice the noble and just demands of all oppressed peoples.

Corrections

The caption for the woodcut opposite to p. 100 of *Chinese Literature* No. 11, 1962 "Goethe's Birthplace" should read "Goethe's House in Weimar." Also on p. 80 of *Chinese Literature* No. 12, 1962, we inadvertently omitted the names of the translators of Su Shih's poems; they are Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang.

Highlights of Chinese History

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